Beginning of

The nature of faith in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard

This title was preceded by

Religious experience and reason as the sources of Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of God

Prayer in intertestamental literature

And is continued by

Some relationships between Second Isaiah and the Pentateuch

Search by title on archive.org to continue reading this collection of Pacific School of Religion Theses from 1942
call number Thesis Cage 1942 A

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Graduate Theological Union

https://archive.org/details/natureoffaithint00unse

THE NATURE OF FAITH
IN THE THOUGHT OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD

GORDON L. FOSTER
A. B. Whittier College, 1939

THESIS
Submitted in the
Department of Philosophy of Religion
and Christian Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity
in the
Pacific School of Religion
1942

THE NATURE OF FAITH

IN THE THOUGHT OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD

GORDON L. FOSTER

A. B. Whittier College, 1939

THESIS

Submitted in the

Department of Philosophy of Religion

and Christian Theology

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Divinity

in the

Pacific School of Religion

1942

PREFACE

Only recently it has been possible to read the works of Søren Kierkegaard in English. For many years, before interest in S.K. awakened in the United States he was widely read and appreciated in Europe. Most of his important writings had long been available in German translations, and a lesser number in French. It was difficult, however, for the English student to have to come to Kierkegaard by way of an involved double translation. S.K.'s style is unique, difficult enough to read in Danish, and the combination of a labored German translation of involved Danish was at times impossible. With the exception of a few articles and fragmentary translations nothing was available until S.K. began to interest several Americans at about the same time.

Among the most important champions of Kierkegaard are Walter Lowrie of Princeton and David F. Swenson of the University of Minnesota. Swenson published the first translation in English of one of S.K.'s complete books--the Philosophical Fragments, 1936. In the five years since the publication of this first English translation there has been a veritable flood of translations by these two men and others. That flood has hardly abated even at the present time and a month does not go by without the appearance of more English editions of Kierkegaard's books. The list is

already too long for listing here.

Not all of the available English translations have been used in this paper. Some few have appeared since the writer started to work and it was not possible to secure them in time for use in the paper. Of those that have been used it will be well to take brief note at this time. Because of the length of many of the titles references to some of the works will be made in the footnotes according to the following key.

After the initial reference in each case the footnotes will designate the works by Kierkegaard in abbreviated form:

Christian Discourses	Christian Discourses, and the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays, trans. by Walter Lowrie.
Fear and Trembling	Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric, by Johannes de Silentio, trans. by Robert Payne.
For Self-Examination	For Self-Examination, and Judge for Yourselves, and Three Discourses, trans. by Walter Lowrie.
Journals	The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, a selection edited and translated by Alexander Dru.
Fragments	Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy, by Johannes Climacus, trans. by David F. Swenson.
Point of View	The Point of View (including the Point of View For My Work as an Author, Two Notes About 'The Individual,' and On My Work as an Author, trans. by Walter Lowrie.

Postscript	Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript (or Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, by Johannes Climacus), trans. by David F. Swenson, completed after his death by Walter Lowrie.
Purity of Heart	Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing, trans. by Douglas V. Steere.
Stages	Stages on Life's Way (or Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Sundry Persons, collected and published by Hilarius Bookbinder), trans. by Walter Lowrie.
Training in Christianity	Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which 'Accompanied' It, trans. by Walter Lowrie.

A complete bibliography will be found at the end of the paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	ii
I. THE LIFE OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD	1
External Events	2
Family Background	2
Boyhood	3
Preparatory School	4
University	4
Perpetual Student	5
Engagement to Regina Olsen	7
First Serious Literary Activity	8
The Corsair Incident	10
Second Period of Literary Activity	14
The Attack on the Established Church	14
Internal Aspects	15
Source of His Melancholy	16
Relationship to His Father	18
Intellectual Development	21
His Broken Engagement	22
His Role as Sufferer	25
II. KIERKEGGARD'S CONCEPT OF FAITH	29
Subjectivity and Objectivity	29
"Existence"	32
Paradox and Passion	33
Eternal Happiness	36
Faith and Objective Uncertainty	38
The "Absurd"	39
The "Offense"	42
The "Leap"	46
Faith an Act of Will	47
Faith as Gift of God	48
Results of Faith in Religious Life	52
Spiritual Tension	52
Intellectual Uncertainty (Dialectics)	56
Absolute versus Relative Ends	57
"Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing"	59
Infinite Resignation	61
Teleological Suspension of Ethics	63
Summary	67

Page

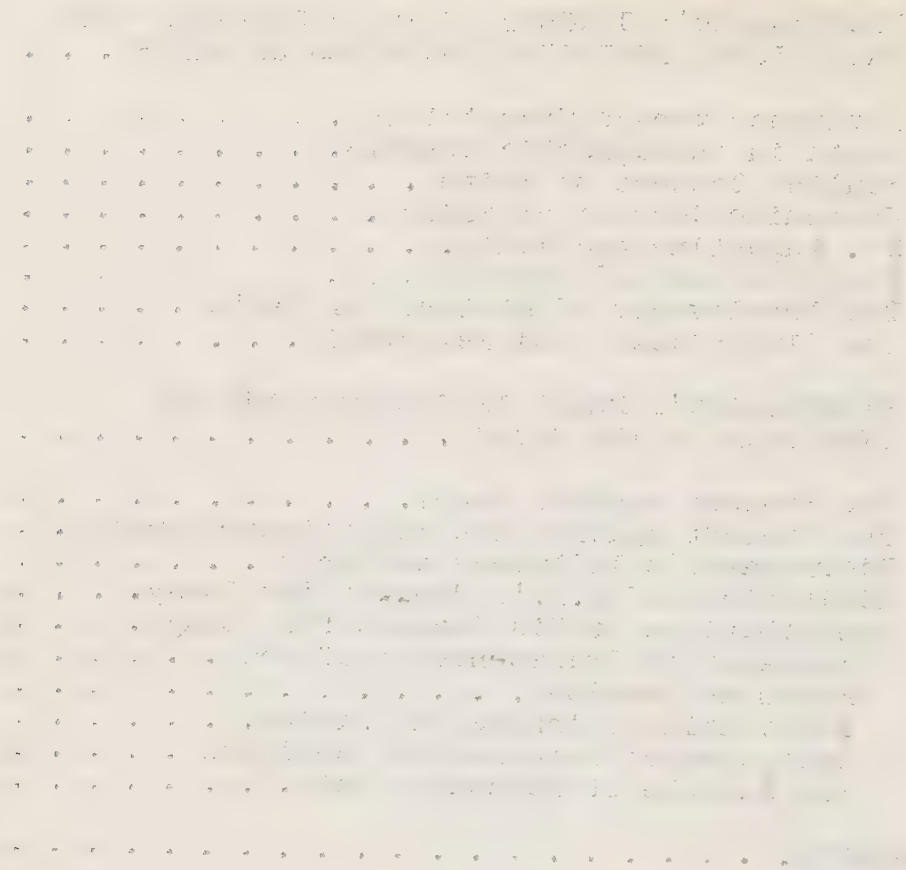
III. KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF FAITH COMPARED WITH TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES OF FAITH . . . 71

Assurance versus Uncertainty 71
Faith in the Synoptic Gospels. 74
Pauline Concept of Faith 76
Johannine Concept of Faith 78
St. Augustine and Faith. 80
Faith in Luther's Thought. 86
The Irrelevance of History for Faith 100
The "Individual" and Fellowship. 105

IV. KIERKEGAARD'S PLACE IN THEOLOGY AND HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY 109

The Protest against Hegel. 109
The Protest against the Established Church . . 113
Kierkegaard's Influence on Barth 114
Limitations of S.K.'s Thought for Today. . . . 121
Contributions of His Thought for Today 124
Emphasis on Transcendence of God 124
Faith as Passion 125
Existential Thinking and Living. 126
Criticism of Intellectual Religion 128
His Example of Personal Piety. 129

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 131



CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD

The attitude with which one approaches a study of Søren Kierkegaard will determine whether one is to be intrigued or repelled by him. If one comes to this "Tremendous Dane," as Walter Lowrie titles him, with a fixed standard of what is "normal" in human personality one will find that Kierkegaard cannot by any means be fitted to that standard. Indeed, to attempt to fit him neatly into any given psychological category is to warp the facts. On the contrary, one needs an enormous amount of imagination and sensitivity if one is to gain even a small understanding of this man who was himself so imaginative and sensitive. There is a kind of reciprocity in the study of biography; one can appreciate in another only those traits and moods which one has in some small degree oneself. This is abundantly clear when one tries to understand Søren Kierkegaard. An extreme extrovert would have little comprehension of, or sympathy with, the kind of melancholic subjectivity so characteristic of S.K. In the same manner, the coldly scientific mind which never dares to venture beyond the realm of experimentally tested fact would find little in common with Kierkegaard's intuitionalism. Thus it is always with the study of great personalities. They so far overflow one's limited concepts of what a man ought to be that one

becomes intolerant of their vices and impatient of their virtues. The intolerance springs from the fact that one does not recognize the degree to which one shares those vices; the impatience arises from the knowledge of how little one shares the virtues.

The external events in the life of Søren Kierkegaard are by no means spectacular. Except for two brief journies to Germany his entire life was spent in Denmark, mostly in Copenhagen. The larger part of his forty-two years were spent in strenuous writing and thinking. Such public recognition as he received was by no means pleasant. It is probably true to say that he was understood by only one or two people during his lifetime. On the whole he was regarded as an eccentric, even slightly mad, character and rumors were circulated about him on every hand. We shall examine later several of the events that served to generate these rumors and give rise to much of the speculation about him on the part of his contemporaries.

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born May 5, 1813, in Copenhagen, the youngest of seven children. At the time of Søren's birth his father was already fifty-six years old. Søren's mother was his father's second wife, having previously been a servant in the home. Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, the father, never ceased the blame himself for the fact that his eldest child by his second wife was born only five months after the wedding.[1] He was an extremely severe old man on the

---

[1]Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 19.

subject of his religion, and such incontinence could not easily be forgotten.

S.K.'s father became a prosperous merchant and was able to build a considerable fortune upon which he later retired and lived quite comfortably. Young Søren Aabye never knew poverty in his youth. He and his brothers and sisters belonged to the more well-to-do, aristocratic society of Copenhagen. In spite of this fact the primary emphasis in the home was not upon material wealth but upon intellectual and spiritual wealth.

"Delicate, slender and weak, deprived of almost every condition requisite for holding my own with other boys"--thus did S.K. describe his youth, writing years later in his Journal.[1] One might be tempted to think that S.K. as a man interpreted his own childhood in gloomier terms than may have been justified in actuality, were it not for the corroborative evidence of those who knew him as a child. During his years in the grammar school, called the School of Civic Virtue, Kierkegaard was certainly an unusual child. One of his classmates wrote in later years that

> '...For the rest of us who led a genuinely boyish life, S.K. was a stranger and an object of compassion, especially on account of his dress, always the same, made of a rough cloth of a dark mixed colour, of a peculiar cut, coat with short skirts...always with low shoes and woolen stockings, never boots. This procured for him the nick-name of Choirboy. This name was used alternately with Søren Sock--an allusion to his father's earlier business as hosier. S.K. was regarded by us all as one whose home was wrapped in a mysterious half-darkness of severity and oddness.'[2]

---

[1]Quoted by Lowrie, ibid., p. 46.

[2]Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Despite such peculiarities of dress, forced upon him by his father, S.K. was able to "hold his own" in other ways. What he lacked in physical brawn he made up for in mental alertness. Many of his biographers recount tales about his biting satire and wit. He was able to annihilate many of his childhood opponents with his stinging tongue, although he suffered as a consequence many a physical beating from his victims. As we shall notice later, he long used his sharp wit as a blind, hiding behind it the depth of his melancholy.

While in the School of Civic Virtue he became a very competent student of the Latin language, although he curiously showed no unusual brilliance in the use of Danish, the language in which he was later to prove such a genius.[1] At the conclusion of his work in the preparatory school at the age of seventeen, S.K. went up to the university. In the customary letter of graduation written by the principal of the Latin school he was described as a boy of quick intelligence, interested in nearly everything, but "'for a long time....childish in a high degree and totally lacking in seriousness.'"[2]

In 1830 he entered the University of Copenhagen and began the study of theology. The field of theology was chosen mainly because of his father's wish in the matter, but also because such a course was the accepted one for a young man of

---

[1]David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, ed. by Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 7.

[2]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 57.

his position.[1] At the end of his first year he took what was termed the "Second Examination." After successfully passing this test he was qualified as a candidate in theology and was thenceforward to pursue his studies in whatever way he willed. As a result he soon turned away from theology and gave full reign to his developing interest in literature.[2] From literature his interests spread to philosophy and he became acquainted with Hegel, an experience which was to have the most far-reaching consequences all the rest of his life.

S.K. now spent ten years of study in various fields, never quite coming to the point where he was ready to take his examinations in theology. Lowrie thinks that in the first years of this long university career S.K.'s chief interests were in aesthetics, the last years in philosophy.[3] The earlier years were filled with the study of such themes as the doubts of Faust, the sensuality of Don Juan, and many kinds of legends and fairy-tales.[4] In his Journals for this long period at the university one finds constant references to Faust, Don Juan, and the Wandering Jew, the latter signifying for Kierkegaard a kind of total despair.[5] All this time S.K. was behaving in a way that confirmed people's opinion that he was just a dandy bent on enjoying his privileged life to the

---

[1] The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, ed. and trans. by Alexander Dru (New York: Oxford university Press, 1938), p. xxi.

[2] Ibid. [3] Op. cit., p. 77. [4] Ibid., p. 78.

[5] Journals, p. 28, #64. Other Journal references: p. 26, #49; p. 27, #57; p. 28, #60; p. 29, #71; p. 30, #75,79; p. 31, #82; p. 36, #90; p. 41, #106; p. 42, #109; p. 43, #115; p. 49, #148; p. 52, #165.

utmost. He dressed in the heigth of fashion, indeed, even over-dressed, and was seen frequently at the theater and on the avenue. Yet Kierkegaard tells us in his most intimate confession that all this witty and sophisticated living had for its chief purpose the hiding and assuaging of the "prodigious melancholy" of which he was the victim from childhood.[1] His Journals for this early period of his university life reveal how strong was the undercurrent of this melancholy. There are frequent indications that he thought seriously of suicide.[2]

In 1838 Søren's father died. Just prior to his death S.K. had become reconciled with his father after a long estransgement. After his father's death S.K. settled down to the work of completing his education in theology. It had always been his father's wish that he do so, but for nine long years he had procrastinated. Now his father was dead, and he felt a curious obligation to fulfil the old man's wish.[3] Two years later he took his degree in theology.

During the year 1838 he published his first book, From the Papers of One Still Living, a critique of Hans Christian Anderson as a novelist. This little volume carried the additional note that it was "Published against his will by S. Kierkegaard."[4] Both the title and the odd signature supply us

---

[1]The Point of View For My Work as an Author, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York:Oxford University Press,1939),pp.76ff, 79.

[2]Journals, p. 26, #52; p. 27, #53.

[3]Eric H. Thomsen, "That Tremendous Dane," Religion in Life, II (1933), p. 250.

[4]Swenson, op. cit., p. 169.

with an early indication that we are dealing with an extraordinary individual. The title of this first book has reference to S.K.'s own surprise at being alive after his father had died. He had always had an ominous certainty that he would never survive his father.[1] The phrase "published against his will," was supposedly to indicate a natural reluctance to give to the public such a severe criticism of a living contemporary.[2] Nevertheless, he did publish the criticism, and we may well speculate about the psychological make-up of an individual who would in effect disclaim responsibility for what was plainly his own wilful act.

We now come to the event in S.K.'s life which has given rise to so many theories about him--his engagement to Regina Olsen. The outward events are quickly told. S.K. met Regina in 1837, when she was only fourteen, and fell in love immediately. According to his own lengthy account in the Journals he decided at once that she was the girl he must eventually marry.[3] He waited three and one half years, during which he completed his university work and took his degree. "During the whole of that time," he wrote, "I let her being penetrate mine."[4] After he took his final examination he called upon her "without further ceremony," and began seriously to court her. "His courtship was audacious, spirited, calculating, and brief. He introduced himself in her home and was quickly accepted by the girl, taking her almost by

---

[1]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 92. [2]Ibid.

[3]Journals, pp. 91-96, #367. [4]Ibid.

storm, though she felt under previous obligation to the man she subsequently married."[1] He became engaged on September 10, 1840--and the next day decided that he had made a fatal mistake. Yet his decision to break the engagement was not easily put into action. Regina was unwilling to let him go. He finally felt that he would have to act the part of a deceiver in order, he imagined, to soften the blow for her.[2] His actions in the affair, judged from the outside were anything but laudable. Consequently he was branded as a trifler with innocent girls and his motives became the subject of malignant gossip for all of Copenhagen. When we come to discuss S.K.'s inner life we shall try to determine whether or not a different color can be put on the matter.

He faced the gossip and slander for several weeks after the engagement was publicly broken, but finally fled to Berlin. He reveals in his Journals that he suffered greatly all through these days. Although he had planned to remain away a year and a half, he actually returned to Copenhagen after only six months.[3] Yet these six months saw the beginning of a phenomenal literary activity. In Berlin S.K. began his first large book, Either-Or; the book was completed back in Copenhagen. This book, together with Repitition, and Fear and Trembling were avowedly written for Regina.[4] They, along with Stages on Life's Way, belong to that period of his develop-

---

[1]Thomsen, op. cit., p. 250. [2]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 219.

[3]Journals

[4]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 232.

ment which he termed "away from the aesthetical," and constitute also the first of his pseudonymous writings which have so puzzled students of his thought.[1]

Between the publication of Either-Or in 1843 and his huge volume of attack on Hegelian speculative philosophy, the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, in 1846, S.K. wrote numerous other important works. Among them were Fear and Trembling by Johannes de Silentio, Repitition by Constantin Constantius, Prefaces by Nicholaus Notabene, the Concept of Dread by Vigilius Haufniensis, the Philosophical Fragments by Johannes Climacus, and Stages on Life's Way by Hilarius Bookbinder.[2]

Since Either-Or is S.K.'s first important effort at pseudonymous writing we should note something of its character. In this book Kierkegaard developed a method of "indirect communication" which he continued to use all his life. He created two authors who represented quite different attitudes toward life. The first author, represented in the first half of the book, is an aesthete whose attitude toward life is determined by considerations of the pleasant and the unpleasant. The young man who allegedly writes this section is the personification of an extreme aesthetical view of the meaning of life. The second half of the book is composed of letters written to the young man in the first part. This second author, however, is a mature man who represents the ethical

---

[1]The Point of View, p. 146.

[2]Journals, p. xliii.

attitude, the attitude which recognizes the claims of duty and morality. The two attitudes are sharply and brilliantly drawn by S.K. although no final choice between them is indicated. To confront each reader by a real choice was the purpose of Kierkegaard: "He who says the book is called Either-Or really says nothing at all, he on the other hand who says that the book is an either-or produces the title himself."[1] It is quite probable that none of S.K.'s contemporaries understood this large book. It would be difficult to interpret it correctly apart from his total life and work.[2]

With the conclusion of the Postscript S.K. had seriously planned to end his writing and take a country parish. He hoped to show the world by this step that he was not simply a dabbler in literature but was truly a Christian.[3] It was never to be thus. An event occured which again gave a new bent to his life and a new impetus to his work as an author.

There was in Copenhagen, a satirical journal, published by a young Jew named Goldschmidt, which specialized in scurrilous attacks on public figures. It was known to use all kinds of questionable methods and it was widely detested--but also widely read. In the course of its literary activities

---

[1]Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 240.

[2]It will be impossible in the course of this paper to give any systematic or complete interpretation of all of Kierkegaard's literary works. I can only refer the interested reader to the valuable synopses of his works at the end of Walter Lowrie's large volume, Kierkegaard. For S.K.'s own interpretation of his work and life one should read that remarkable little confession, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, written at the close of his life.

[3]Thomsen, op. cit., p. 252.

this journal had hinted that Victor Eremita (one of S.K.'s pseudonyms) would be immortal. Shortly after this one of the contributing editors, P. L. Møller, wrote a review of Stages on Life's Way, publishing it in another magazine. In the review he frivolously and uncritically praised the book, but also took occasion to bring to the public gaze again all the gossip about S.K.'s engagement and private life. S.K. had long abhorred the Corsair, as Goldschmidt's journal was called, and took this occasion to deal it a mortal blow. Undoubtedly he thought he would have more support in his crusade than he actually did.[1]

Kierkegaard immediately answered P. L. Møller by letting his pseudonym Frater Taciturnus attack the Corsair and Møller in a daily paper. He protested being made immortal by the Corsair and suggested that it was somewhat of a dishonour to be praised by such a journal, especially since all others had been abused there.

> Would only that I might now shortly get into The Corsair. It is really hard on a poor author to be thus singled out in Danish literature as the only one (assuming that all we pseudonyms are one) who is not abused there.[2]

There is little reason to doubt that S.K. launched his attack in the spirit of public protest against an evil publication. It was certainly a courageous step to take, and his Journals reveal how deeply he suffered in the events that followed. That his criticism of the Corsair was not based on

---

[1] Journals, p. 159.

[2] Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 350.

a selfish desire for personal revenge is proved by entries in his journal,[1] and by a letter he had written earlier and never published.[2] It is evident that S.K. had long been aware of the vulgarity of the Corsair and that his attack upon that organ was premeditated.

Whether or not Kierkegaard truly desired to be included among those who had gained the "distinction" of being attacked by the Corsair, his spoken wish was soon fulfilled--and in a fashion he had not fully anticipated. There followed a long series of stinging articles and cruel cartoons which made S.K. the object of the vulgar jokes of the crowd for years to come. He was pictured limping through the streets, umbrella under his arm, one trouser leg noticeably shorter than the other. His physical deformities were mercilessly cartooned and he was made to appear in every kind of ridiculous pose. Perhaps the climax of unethical cruelty was reached when he was pictured riding on the back of a girl, with the caption underneath reading, "Frater Taciturnus, breaking in his girl!"[3]

So bad did the situation become that S.K. could not appear on the street without becoming the target of the jeers of small boys. His name became a joke throughout all Denmark. He comments in his Journal several years later:

> They have infected the air for me.....Curiosity surrounds me everywhere. I travel five miles out to my dear

---

[1] Journals, pp. 160, 162, #589.

[2] Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 348, 349.

[3] Thomsen, op. cit., p. 253.

forest district--ah! everywhere curiosity.

And so I am wasted upon Denmark.....My Christian name exists as a nickname for me which every school-boy knows. Ever more frequently the same name is now used by authors, in comedies it now appears regularly, and everybody knows that it is I.[1]

There seems to have been a masochistic element in S.K. in connection with both the breaking of his engagement and his attack on the Corsair. There is no doubt that he suffered, and suffered deeply and permanently, yet he seems almost to have welcomed the suffering and derived some deeper satisfaction and joy from it. In the midst of his sorrow over his broken engagement he writes: "When the bonds were broken my thoughts were these: either you throw yourself into the wildest kind of life--or else become absolutely religious...."[2] He recognized the choice presented to him in his extremity, and we have the feeling that he was certain all along which choice he would make--the religious. In a similar manner he regarded the conflict with the Corsair. It was hard to bear yet he believed that "it was the tension of reality which put a new string in my instrument."[3] We can but wonder how much S.K. tended to exaggerate in retrospect, until really insignificant happenings took on the appearance of existence shaking crises. He had an inordinate capacity for brooding over the events of his life, filling page after page of his Journal with reflections about his conduct. Not only this, his entire literary activity had always a strong biographical

---

[1]Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 354.

[2]Journals, p. 95.

[3]Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 364.

orientation. He saw himself as a kind of reincarnation of Socrates,[1] as Abraham making his sacrifice at God's command;[2] in each case he felt himself to be living the role of the ancient individual.

The immediate result of the Corsair incident was S.K.'s resolve to give up any plans for a country parish and to stay in Copenhagen to face the music. He was determined to continue writing, only now with a definitely religious emphasis. His works now became specifically an attempt to define Christianity. In five years he published such works as the following: The Works of Love, Edifying Addresses, Christian Discourses, Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, Sickness Unto Death, Training in Christianity, and For Self-Examination.

His work went on fairly smoothly until the last year of his life. In that year he began his brief but scathing attack on the established Church of Denmark. In some circles S.K. is best known for this onslaught, which is a comparison of orthodox Christianity with the New Testament Christianity of Jesus and the apostles. With all the skill of his mind and pen Kierkegaard stormed against the mediocrity of the "official" Church of his day. The chief burden of his attack was that true Christianity did not exist in Denmark. In 1854 he wrote,

> This must be said--so let it be said: Whosoever thou art, whatever thy life may be, my friend--by ceasing to

---

[1] Journals, p. 111, #414. Also Swenson, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

[2] Cf. Fear and Trembling.

take part (if in fact thou dost) in the public function of divine worship as it now is, thou hast one guilt the less, and a great one, that thou dost not take part in treating God as a fool, and in calling that the Christianity of the New Testament which is not the Christianity of the New Testament.[1]

This was the beginning of a crusade that made S.K. once more a popular figure. The pamphlet, the Instant, which he published until his death secured for itself a wide circulation. The Instant appealed to the crowd, but it only antagonized the Church. Most pastors understood nothing of the deep insight which was the basis of the attack. They had never read any of S.K.'s books. It is to be feared, also, that the crowd loved this campaign against the Church not out of any appreciation of true Christianity, but out of a craving for sensation and excitement.

In the midst of this period of turmoil, after nine issues of the Instant had been published, S.K. fell unconscious on the street as he was coming from the bank. He had just withdrawn the last of the sizeable fortune that had been left to him. He was without money, except for sufficient to pay his funeral expenses. Taken to the hospital on October 2, 1855, he died on November 11. To the very end he maintained a strong opposition to everything connected with the institutional Church; he refused to take Communion from the hand of a clergyman.

Internal Aspects of Kierkegaard's Life

We have spoken so far mainly of the external factors

---

[1]Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 569.

in the life of Søren Kierkegaard. The problems in connection with the inner aspects of his life are vastly more important--and vastly more complex. Where, for example, did he receive that "prodigious melancholy" of which he so eternally speaks? What was there is his past psychological history that made him deliberately court a girl and then suddenly decide he could never marry her? What lies behind the deception he so carefully worked out with regard to the type of person he really was? Such are only a few of the questions that students of Kierkegaard's life have asked, and tried to answer.

If we are to gain any understanding of the melancholy temperament that was his, we must begin with his father. We have already noted that S.K. was dominated by his father in his youth. Nowhere is there any significant mention of any influence by his mother. It was the father who shaped and molded the son's earliest impressions. Throughout S.K.'s writings one finds references to the dread he inherited from his father. Most biographers believe the elder Kierkegaard's melancholy to have stemmed from two sources: a momentary rebellion against God, and a later incontinence after the death of his first wife. With regard to the first cause we are apt to be impatient; we find it difficult to understand how such a spiritual lapse could pathologically color a man's entire life. We do not understand because we do not know anything of the austere religion of a century ago. The much quoted entry in S.K.'s Journal refering to his father's boyhood rebellion nevertheless contains the clue to much in the

lives of both men:

> The terrible fate of the man who as a small boy once mounted a hill and cursed God, because he was hungry and cold, and had to endure hardships while herding sheep.... and that man found it impossible to forget this when he had reached the age of eighty-two.[1]

This rebellion ever on his conscience, the father sought refuge in a severe religious discipline. More than that, he insisted that his family fit into the same mold, with the result that the children, extremely sensitive as they were, suffered greatly under the burden. In a curiosuly perverse way the elder Kierkegaard regarded all his wealth, his gifted children and his other good fortune suspiciously. He should have experienced God's wrath, but instead he seemed to be flooded with blessings! Could it be that these were in reality a judgment upon him and that he had not been forgiven? The old man lived under a dread too heavy for him, and his youngest son learned inevitably to share that dread. In the Point of View he describes his childhood religious training:

> As a child I was sternly and seriously brought up in Christianity. Humanly speaking, it was a crazy (mad) upbringing. Already in my earliest childhood I broke down under the grave impression which the melancholy old man who laid it upon me himself sank under. A child--what a crazy thing!--travestied as an old man. Frightful! what a wonder then that there were times when Christianity appeared to me the most inhuman cruelty--although never, even when I was farthest from it, did I cease to revere it....[2]

Yet strangely it was from this ambivalent attitude of fear and reverence toward Christianity that S.K. developed his later definition of dread as "an attraction to what one

---

[1]Swenson, op. cit., p. 4; also Journals, p. 150, #556.

[2]Op. cit., p. 76.

fears, a sympathetic antipathy."[1] So it was with many of his most important ideas--they were rooted in early experiences so profound that he never forgot them. Some of his insights into the psychological factors that formed him foreshadow by nearly a century the developments of depth psychology. Note, for example, the following passage from the Journals:

> The terrible thing is when a man's consciousness is subjected to such pressure from childhood up that not even the elasticity of the soul, nor all the energy of freedom can rid him of it. Sorrow in life can certainly depress the conscious, but if the sorrow first appears at a mature age it does not have time to take that natural form, it becomes an historic fact, not something which lies as it were beyond the conscious itself. The man who has born such a pressure from childhood up is like a child who has been taken from its mother with forceps and who always bears a memento of its mother's suffering.[2]

It is upon such passages as this that S.K.'s fame as a keen psychologist rests.

The father's effect upon the son could not have been so profound had not their relationship been very close. S.K. received from his father more than his melancholia, he received also valuable training in dialectical thinking. The father was witty and exceptionally brilliant and his home was a place of intellectual stimulation, from all of which young Søren benefited greatly. It has therefore been a keen problem to discover the sources of his very deep maladjustment. It is clear that he suspected nothing of the real reasons for his father's melancholy until he was twenty-five years old.[3] Thus he had no conscious reason for sharing his father's problem.

---

[1]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 76. [2]P. 112, #420.

[3]Thomsen, op. cit., p. 249.

His own maladjustment manifested itself early in his over-abundance of wit. In the earlier part of his life this was frequently so malicious that people could not stand it. He himself, at the time and later, recognized that he possessed this characteristic to a degree beyond normal. Yet this too is not the source, but only the evidence, of his unbalance.

The only hypothesis which seems at all satisfactory is based on the assumption that genius and neurosis go hand in hand. Frequently genius depends upon an extremely sensitive nervous system capable of responding quickly and radically to stimuli that would leave an ordinary person untouched. Greater sensitivity, however, also means greater capacity for being hurt. This rare sensitivity may well be caused by physiological disorders of nerve and brain cells,[1] and corresponds sometimes to other physical shortcomings. S.K. was always rather sick and weak, and while this does not prove a mental or psychical disequilibrium it may be suggestive. It is also true that S.K. regarded himself as in some measure different, psychically, than ordinary men. In the Journals he writes:

> My misfortune, or the thing that made my life so difficult, is that I am strung a whole tone higher than other men, and where I am and what I am about does not have to do with the particular, but always also with a principle and an idea. At the best, most people think which girl they ought to marry; I had to think about marriage. And so in everything.[2]

In Fear and Trembling S.K. discusses the relationship between genius and mental derangement, thus proving that he is not

---

[1] Ibid., p. 259. [2] P. 314, #928.

mad enough to be unaware of his own problem.[1]

Without dogmatically asserting any particular theory about S.K.'s sanity we may note one more discussion of the problem.

> ....Søren Kierkegaard, like many other genius, was distorted and deformed both physically and psychologically.... This philosophy of paradox evidently emanated from a source verging upon the pathological; but the study of genius, that pearl festering on the oyster of normality, suggests that, in most cases, when the element of pathology is eliminated, that of genius is apt to disappear.[2]

Whatever the psychological basis of S.K.'s melancholy, we recognize that without it he could never have made the contribution he has made.

If we are to trust his own judgment about his life we must understand many of his actions as the result of a consistent effort to hide his melancholy. Thus in the bitterly ironic passage in the Journals about to be quoted we are given a glimpse of a deparate moodiness hidden from others by an exaggerated frivolity.

> I have just returned from a party of which I was the life and soul; wit poured from my lips, everyone laughed and admired me--but I went away--and the dash should be as long as the earth's orbit----------
> ----------
> ----------and wanted to shoot myself.[3]

And what began as a natural defense mechanism against a world that could never understand became in later life a self-conscious, cleverly contrived, deception. He describes, at

---

[1]Trans. by Robert Payne (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 160-161.

[2]M. Chaning-Pearce, The Terrible Crystal (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1940), p. 4.

[3]P. 27, #53.

great length, in the Point of View the lengths to which he went to persuade people that he was a play-boy, a lazy aesthete, who did no work if he could help it. Yet all the time he was furiously at work on serious literary enterprises. His explanation (or rationalization?) was that the effectiveness of his aesthetic works would be impaired if people were to attach loyalty to his person. While he was reading the proofs of Either-Or, a job which took many hours each day, he carefully appeared at the theater for five or ten minutes each evening, just to be seen there. Why?

> Because I feared the big book would create for me too great a reputation. And why did I do this? Because I knew human nature, especially in Copenhagen. To be seen every night for five minutes by several hundred people sufficed to substantiate the opinion: He hasn't the least thing in the world to do; he is a mere idler.[1]

Throughout the period in his life when he was drifting about in the University S.K. was secretly trying to place himself. He came into contact with the Hegelian philosophy and studied it intensely. For a time it held a great fascination for him, but he gradually worked his way through until he became its most severe critic. Hegel's speculative philosophy did not satisfy the deepest demand of his soul for a philosophy that was immediately related to ethical living. S.K.'s "either-or" was eternally opposed to Hegel's type of dialectical progress, "both-and". For S.K. the most vitally real experience in life was the "choice" which eternally confronted man. Speculative philosophy failed to face this problem squarely and S.K. finally attacked with great penetration and

---

[1]Point of View, pp. 49, 50.

wit the Hegelian assumption that existence could be rationally explained and fitted into a system. His own requirements he set down in his Journal when only twenty-two years of age:

> What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. What would be the use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and of being able, if required, to review them all and show up the inconsistencies within each system;.....--what good would it do me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life. [1]

This entry seems to forecast the whole emphasis of his life's work, an emphasis which he underlined at the close of his life when he wrote that his whole literary activity had been addressed to the task of how to become a Christian.[2]

It may be true, then, that the particular bent and emphasis of S.K.'s thought can be traced to his melancholy spirit. His psychic malady forced him to ask the deepest religious questions and drove him to seek the answers. He was under a terrible necessity to find the ultimate meaning of the existence that was often so painful for him. His haunting dread brought him to another experience which was to permanently influence his life--his brief engagement and its sudden termination.

Why did he break his engagement? Most biographers are willing to accept Kierkegaard's own explanation--that he

---

[1] Journals, p. 15.

[2] Point of View, p. 92, and passim.

could not share the secret of his melancholy with her, that he did not care to bind himself to anything that might sidetrack the religious task he had set for himself. Lowrie tries to prove that S.K. had a guilty feeling about a visit to a brothel in his period of dissipation and that this guilt he could not divulge. It seems to me that Lowrie's argument is precarious. It is based on an inference: namely, that all of the entries in Quidam's Diary (a section in Stages on Life's Way) are autobiographical that are dated the fifth of the month, midnight.[1] Among these entries is one entitled "A Possibility" which is a story of a shy bookkeeper who, in a moment of drunken weakness, allows himself to be led to a brothel. Subsequently the bookkeeper was obsessed with the "possibility" that "another being owed its life to him."[2] Furthermore, this obsession forced the bookkeeper into a lifelong study of human facial characteristics with the expectation that some day his heir might be discovered. On the basis of this story, and S.K.'s frequent mention of the fact that he was "a penitent", plus his known interest in children, P. A. Heiberg, the editor of S.K.'s Papers, formed his theory of Kierkegaard's sexual lapse as a youth. Lowrie and others agree with him.[3]

This may be the correct interpretation. I do not think, however, that we need such a labored explanation of

---

[1]Stages on Life's Way, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 258 (footnote).

[2]Ibid., p. 265. [3]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 132.

the break with Regina. Kierkegaard was a solitary individual, psychologically unable to qualify that solitude by a close relationship with another human being. Evidence of this is to be seen also in the fact that he had no really intimate friends during his entire life. His destiny, and he recognized it as such, was to "will one thing", and his striving after God took precedence finally over every other consideration. During his successful courtship the issue did not clearly come home to him; once he had definitely committed himself and reflected on that fact, it became an impossible situation to him. He suddenly felt that God was commanding him not to take this step.[1] Already with some degree of resignation he wrote: "But in so far as I was what, alas, I was, I had to say that I could be happier in my unhappiness without her than with her...."[2] Impatient as we may become with S.K.'s endless self-concern we must, I believe, admit that he had a true insight about himself when he wrote the words I have just quoted. Professor Swenson quotes one of S.K.'s biographers in what seems to me to be a true summary of the situation:

> "The mere mention of the engagement sounds strangely in our ears. It is as if someone had said: 'On such and such a day, in such and such a year, Saint Simeon Stylites stepped down from his column, offered his arm to a young lady, and invited her to step up with him on the top of the column in order to share with him his narrow standing-room.'"[3]

It is impossible to underestimate the effect of this

---

[1] Journals, p. 93. [2] Ibid.

[3] Op. cit., p. 14.

tragically neurotic love affair upon Kierkegaard's subsequent life. Twelve years later on the anniversary of the engagement he wrote in the Journal that "humanly speaking" she still had first place in his life. Yet God really had first place, he continued. "My engagement to her and the break are really my relation to God, they are....divinely speaking, my engagement with God."[1] In other words, S.K. felt that his break with Regina served to bring him into a relationship with God. It is certainly true that after the engagement was terminated his life and work took on a specifically Christian direction in a deeper sense than before.

Kierkegaard's life was dominated by the thought that he had been set aside by God to suffer for the truth. It was this conviction which led him to the idea that the unfailing sign of the true Christian is whether he suffers. At the close of his life this seemed obviously the explanation of all that had happened to him. "From an early age I have suffered from a thorn in the flesh to which the consciousness of sin and guilt has attached itself....This suffering, this difference I have understood as my relation to God...."[2] In another place he remarks that it "is the teaching of Christianity: to be loved by God and to love God is to suffer."[3] That this doctrine involved him in a dilema S.K. recognized. He admitted that though he himself could never enjoy life, in a worldly sense, he did get a melancholy joy out of observing

---

[1] Journals, p. 479, #1281.

[2] Ibid., p. 487, #1288. [3] Ibid., p. 484, #1287.

the happiness of others. Yet he believed he must preach "mortification" and suffering as the true Christian evidence, "....my soul is suspicious of earthly enjoyment and worldly victories."[1]

I shall conclude this discussion of the inner aspects of Kierkegaard's life with several important quotations bearing on the place and function of suffering in relation to the religious life, and in relation to his own experience. This emphasis seems to me to be the ground of all S.K. has to say about religious faith. The theme recurs innumerable times in all his writings, which indicates how central it was in his thinking and in his life. Søren Kierkegaard suffered--how much and how deeply we can never fully appreciate. Because his personal suffering was so genuine and intense he was extremely impatient of all idle talk about suffering. One of the most trenchant sentences in his Journal is found under the heading, The Two Ways, "one is to suffer; the other is to become a professor of the fact that another suffered."[2]

Reflecting on the place of suffering in his own life he wrote in 1853, two years before his death:

> There are two thoughts which were so early in my soul that I cannot really discover their origin. The first is that there are men whose qualification is to be sacrificed, in one way or another, sacrificed for others in order to forward the idea--and that, with my particular cross, I was such a man.[3]

There may be some who will be able to see in such a statement only colossal egoism, or worse, pathological de-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 485. [2] Journals, p. 528, #1362.

[3] Ibid., p. 490, #1294.

lusions of gradeur. I would heartily disagree. Taken within the entire context of S.K.'s remarkable life such a statement comes in the category of the religious. I could not say this were I not a firm believer in the fundamental sincerity and ruthless honesty of this man. Again and again I have found myself leveling criticisms at Kierkegaard, only to discover upon further study that he had leveled the same criticisms at himself. If this were not sufficient proof we have a statement written only a few weeks before his death, a statement which is of the very essence of religious faith.

> Indeed, it is by such torments as mine that a man is educated to endure to be a sacrifice; and the infinite grace which was shown unto me and still is shown consists in being selected as a sacrifice--selected for this end, yes, and then still further developed to the point where one can maintain that this is the highest degree of grace that the God of love can show to any man, hence only to His beloved.[1]

A long time has beenspent examining the external and internal aspects of Kierkegaard's life--is such a detailed consideration necessary? Certainly it would not be if S.K. were an ordinary religious writer. There are many men about whom we need to know literally nothing at all in order to gain a complete understanding of what they write. It is precisely here that Kierkegaard differs so completely. As we have repeatedly noted, S.K.'s religious concepts are inextricably bound up with what he was. For this reason every writer who starts to discuss Kierkegaard as philosopher, or theologian, must begin with Kierkegaard the man. He is the

---

[1]Quoted by Lowrie, op. cit., p. 231. The passage is taken from the last number of the Instant which was ready for the printer when S.K. died.

best possible example of the truth of his own central thesis that it is the "existing" individual that is important.

S.K. was not understood by his contemporaries partly because they lacked perspective upon his whole life. We are in an incomparably better position to understand him, since we have his Journals and the Point of View, the latter written expressly as a clue to his writings. Should we fail to heed the clue he provided us in this last small book we could only misunderstand him and do his thought a great injustice. With some working knowledge of his unique life we are better equipped to find our way in the voluminous material which flowed from his pen. With these warnings, which have come out of my own experience, I shall move on to the central problem of this paper: what does Kierkegaard mean by faith?

CHAPTER TWO

KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF FAITH

"I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere," commented Johannes Climacus in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments.[1] Anyone who has read this huge book will be willing to grant that Johannes (Kierkegaard) entirely succeeded in his avowed purpose. The Postscript marked S.K.'s most strenuous effort to define the problem, "How am I to become a Christian?" His answer runs into five hundred frequently repititious pages. Yet with all his verbosity Kierkegaard has given us here an astounding book, full of striking insights and fresh intuitions. The entire work is interwoven with rich satire, vigorous polemic, and unexpected humor. In the discussion of faith to follow, the Postscript will constitute the chief reference. We shall also draw from the Philosophical Fragments, Fear and Trembling, and the Journals; with less frequency we shall turn to the shorter discourses and specifically religious writings.

It becomes necessary at the very beginning to distinguish between "subjectivity" and "objectivity" in the Kierkegaardian sense. By his constant emphasis upon subjectivity S.K. did not mean to approve what we usually call subjective

---

[1]Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 166.

thinking--thinking that is warped by the personal equation. Modern psychology has glorified objectivity, by which it has meant the ability of the well-integrated personality to view himself and his world with a minimum of egocentricity. Kierkegaard does not use the term objectivity in quite this sense; nor does he equate subjectivity with egocentricity. On the contrary, the subjective thinker is precisely the one equipped to gain a deeper and truer understanding of reality. Subjectivity is the apprehension of the truth that man can never completely transcend his finite existence. For S.K. this meant that only that was true that was essentially related to the existence of the individual. "All essential knowledge relates to existence, or only such knowledge as has an essential relationship to existence is essential knowledge."[1]

The concept of subjectivity must be understood in relation to its opposite, objectivity. The latter term signified for S.K. the cool, disinterested approach to the world that found its great expression in Hegelian speculative philosophy. The chief target of S.K.'s polemics was the philosopher who constructed his abstract systems with complete disregard of their relation to religious and ethical living. Kierkegaard's constantly reiterated thesis was "that the Hegelian philosophy, by failing to define its relation to the existing individual, and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."[2] The abstract thinker thinks sub specie aeterni and thus ignores the concrete problems of existence in time. The fact that the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 176. [2] Ibid., p. 275.

existing individual is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal completely escapes his attention.[1] Thus he does not recognize the fundamental paradox of human life. S. K. humorously suggests that such persons are really absent-minded since they forget that they are existing individuals.

Truth, for the person who is reflecting objectively, becomes an external set of facts, separated entirely from the actual existence of the thinker. Religious truth is thus thought to be an independently objective set of beliefs of doctrines. "The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads away from the subject...."[2] Kierkegaard does not decry intellectual objectivity as such, but only when it is held that man can solve the mystery of life and the universe by that method. It is the objective method applied to the religious problems of God and human existence which constitutes a contradiction in terms. Those things are only true for us which we inwardly grasp and appropriate. S.K.'s attitude toward speculative philosophy is well summed up in the following passage:

> The thinker who can forget in all his thinking also to think that he is an existing individual, will never explain life. He merely makes an attempt to cease to be a human being, in order to become a book or an objective something.... It is not denied that objective thought has validity, but in connection with all thinking where subjectivity must be acentuated, it is a misunderstanding. If a man occupied himself, all his life through, solely with logic, he would nevertheless not become logic; he must therefore himself exist in different categories. Now if he finds that this is not worth thinking about, the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 267. [2] Ibid., p. 173.

> choice must be his responsibility. But it will scarcely be pleasant for him to learn, that existence itself mocks everyone who is engaged in becoming purely objective.[1]

Existence is the fundamental category from which S.K. begins and to which he returns. Every human being, with no possible exceptions, is in existence for "existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal."[2] The English language does not distinguish sufficiently between "existenz" in the Kierkegaardian sense and the ordinary use of existence as synonymous with "to be." It is therefore better to use the German word existenz to signify this characteristic quality of human life as over against animal or physical existence. To exist in this sense is to live "so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, at one and the same time eternal and as if far removed from existence, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming."[3] Since existence is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite every individual who thinks existentially is aware of a double orientation: to the ethical demands of the world of his fellow human beings, and to eternal demands of God. To think existentially is to feel oneself vitally concerned with the deepest problems of life and death. One cannot stand off from these problems and assume the relationship of a spectator to them. Quite the opposite, one must confront them with one's entire personality as decisions of life and death importance.

There is a fundamental choice which confronts the

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 85, 86. [2] Ibid., p. 85. [3] Ibid., p. 273.

existing individual: either "he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual,"[1] or "he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual."[2] When the existing individual chooses to forget that he is such he is a comic figure, says S.K., because "existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not." It is no more comical for a man to will to be what he is not, e.g., a bird, that it is for him to will not to be what he is, an existing individual. There is something extremely comical in the thought of the speculative philosopher who immediately after setting down his profoundest thought must turn aside from his desk to sneeze. We cannot escape the fact that we are finite beings never quite able to rise free of existence. S.K. criticizes modern philosophy because, "in a sort of world-historical absent-mindedness," it has forgotten what it means for you and I, as individuals, to exist, to be human beings.

If we concentrate our energy upon the fact that we are existing individuals we will think existentially, which means in the words of H. R. Mackintosh, to think "with the unfailing consciousness that we stand before God, guilty and blind, awaiting His judgment and mercy."[1] As consciously existing individuals we can subjectively appropriate the paradox of our existence: we are related to the infinite yet imbedded in the finite. This paradox cannot be resolved com-

---

[1] Types of Modern Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 225.

pletely no matter how objective and detached we strive to become with respect to our finite attachments.[1] Yet there are moments when the existing individual is able to take up the paradox and see it related to a higher unity. Momentarily the individual realizes a unity of the finite and the infinite-- a realization that comes only in a moment of "passion."[2] What does all this mean in simpler terms? It means that when an individual is deeply and radically concerned with his own soul and its relation to God, he may experience in a moment of holy, passionate worship a sense of self-transcendence. He knows then that the contradiction between the finite and the infinite, which he cannot rationally resolve, nevertheless finds its resolution in God. It is the passion which now becomes the significant condition. The speculative philosopher is not passionately concerned to relate his speculations to his own existence, but the subjective, existential thinker is so concerned. Thus the absence or presence of passion becomes of vital importance. It is in relation to this concept of "passion" that we find S.K. talking about "faith". "Faith is the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity."[3] We are now in a better position to consider the meaning of faith in the thought of Kierkegaard.

One of S.K.'s most puzzling phrases, "eternal happiness," is also one of his most frequent. When one confronts

---

[1] Postscript, p. 176. "Modern philosophy has tried everything and anything in the effort to help the individual to transcend himself objectively, which is a wholly impossible feat; existence exercises its restraining influence...."

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 118.

the question of one's eternal happiness with an infinite, personal, passionate interest, faith is the end result. S.K. seems to mean by eternal happiness the most fundamental truth concerning the meaning of the individual's life. It is principally the question of immortality, the destiny of the individual human soul, the relationship of the individual to God--all of these things are a part of the problem of one's eternal happiness. Going one step farther: these things are the very essence of Christianity. As we have already seen, an individual may be interested in his eternal happiness in two different ways. He may raise the question of the historical truth of what Christianity teaches concerning eternal happiness, in which case he will approach the problem objectively. Or he may ask, existentially, how he can achieve eternal happiness, how he can become a Christian, in which case he will approach the problem subjectively. In the first instance the inquirer is not infinitely, personally, and passionately interested; he is only objectively interested in what eternal happiness is, he is only concerned to establish the historical accuracy of what Christianity teaches. In the second instance, however, when the individual asks, "How may I achieve eternal happiness," there can be no question of a disinterested appraisal of historical Christianity. The absolute difference between these two approaches which Kierkegaard sees can be made clear perhaps in his own words.

> The speculative philosopher....proposes to contemplate Christianity from the philosophical standpoint. It is a matter of indifference to him whether anyone accepts it

or not.[1]

> The more objective the contemplative inquirer, the less he bases an eternal happiness, i.e. his eternal happiness, upon his relationship to the inquiry; since there can be no question of an eternal happiness except for the passionately and infinitely interested subject.[2]

> As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, and passion eliminated from subjectivity, and the infinite interest eliminated from passion, there is in general no decision at all, either in this problem or in any other. All decisiveness, all essential decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity. A contemplative spirit, and this is what the objective subject is, feels nowhere any definite need of a decision, and sees no decision anywhere.[3]

Faith is inseparable from passion. It is a meaningless jumble of words to talk about a disinterested faith. There can be no greater mistake than to think of faith as a preliminary step to knowledge. Yet many would describe faith in such superficial terms, meaning by it the tentative holding of a belief in the absence of proof, always with the expectation that the proof will be forthcoming. Kierkegaard speaks of the "certainty that lurks at the door of faith and threatens to devour it."[4] There is no need for faith, and no place for passion, when there is certainty of knowledge, "for if passion is eliminated, faith no longer exists, and certainty and passion do not go together."[5]

In reading S.K. we must always keep in mind his distinction between objective and subjective knowledge. We might otherwise be tempted to think that certainty, instead of being

---

[1] Ibid., p. 51. [2] Ibid., p. 33. [3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 30. [5] Ibid.

destructive of passion, would be the necessary foundation of passion. Upon reflection, however, we recognize that it would be difficult to be passionately concerned about a fact that had no relation to our individual existence before God. The real fact is this: it requires no effort of will, no burning struggle, no desperate passion, to believe something that is easily and quickly proved. It does require an effort of will, a struggle, and a passion to believe something that cannot be objectively tested and proved. Hence I can easily believe, because it can be historically validated, that a Jew by the name of Jesus lived in Palestine during the rule of the Roman emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Such an objective fact is not the proper object of faith. How different it is when I am asked to believe that this same Jesus was at once God and man, that he was in truth the Son of God. Here is something that demands passion to believe; objectively it is an uncertainty, yet I can appropriate it inwardly and made it a subjective certainty.

Kierkegaard specifically deals with the relation between faith and objective uncertainty in the following passages:

> When subjectivity is the truth, the conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis to objectivity, a memento of the fork in the road where the way swings off; this expression will at the same time serve as an indication of the tension of the subjective inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual....The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite. I contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding

> God, and I see omnipotence and wisdom; but I also see much else that disturbs my mind and excites anxiety. The sum of all this is an objective uncertainty. But it is for this very reason that the inwardness becomes as intense as it is, for it embraces this objective uncertainty with the entire passion of the infinite. In the case of a mathematical proposition the objectivity is given, but for this reason the truth of such a proposition is also an indifferent truth.[1]

In the very next paragraph S.K. goes on to say that the above definition of subjective truth can be applied equally well to faith. Where there is no risk there can be no faith. "Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's awareness and the objective uncertainty."[2] It is because I cannot grasp God objectively and prove that he exists that I must <u>believe</u>. We see here the foundation of the anti-rationalism in Kierkegaard that became so extreme toward the close of his life.

Since faith is essentially the passionate belief in something that is objectively uncertain, the existing individual must strive to maintain that objective uncertainty as the condition of preserving his faith. What is this uncertainty which the individual appropriates with passionate inwardness? S.K.'s thought is so intricate at this point that one cannot be sure one has understood. He speaks of a kind of double paradox. There is first of all the paradoxical nature of the fact that what is objectively uncertain can nevertheless be the truth for an existing individual. In this case we are not thinking of the truth as paradoxical <u>in itself</u>, but only as becoming paradoxical in relation to an

---

[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 182. [2] <u>Ibid</u>.

existing individual.[1] For Kierkegaard, however, there is yet a more difficult paradox. He speaks of the paradox which is paradoxical in itself. It is only with great effort that we can see in this anything more than a baffling confusion of words. We have seen that one type of paradox is discovered when eternal truth relates itself to a particular existing individual. But when the eternal truth itself has come into being in time--then it can be said that a paradox exists in the eternal truth itself.[2] This paradox which is paradoxical in itself is what S.K. is pleased to call "the absurd."

What is the absurd? Let us try to designate its meaning in more concrete, Christian terms than we have been able to find heretofore. "The absurd is--that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals."[3] This is the problem that S.K. deals with in the Philosophical Fragments, although in that book he does not use Christian terms. In his Journals he speaks of the difficulty of understanding "the thought that the content of faith is, for the reason and for the third person who is not a believer, the absurd, and that to become a believer

---

[1] Ibid., p. 183-185. Notice the difficult formulation here: "When subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that subjectivity is the truth" (p. 183). Also: "But the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself a paradox; but it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual" (p. 183).

[2] Ibid., p. 187.

[3] Ibid., p. 188.

everyone must be alone with the absurd."[1] Apparently the absurd is that most radical of contradictions--Jesus is God, yet man.

The absurd, in order properly to be the absurd, must repel the reason. There can be no probability about the absurd, no possibility that by further study we might come to understand the absurd. Kierkegaard makes this absolutely clear in the Postscript by satirizing the person who desires to have faith but first of all wants proof that his faith is founded on objectively tested fact.

> Suppose a man who wishes to acquire faith; let the comedy begin. He wishes to have faith, but he wishes also to safeguard himself by means of an objective inquiry and its approximation-process. What happens? With the help of the approximation-process the absurd becomes something different; it becomes probable, it becomes increasingly probable, it becomes extremely and emphatically probable. Now he is ready to believe it, and he ventures to claim for himself that he does not believe as shoemakers and tailors and simple folk believe, but only after long deliberation. Now he is ready to believe it; and lo, now it has become precisely impossible to believe it. Anything that is almost probable, or probable, or extremely and emphatically probable, is something he can almost know, or as good as know, or extremely and emphatically almost know--but it is impossible to believe. For the absurd is the object of faith, and the only object that can be believed.[2]

The paradox which constitutes the absurd is the idea that something (God, eternal essential truth) which can become historical "only in direct opposition to all human reason," has nevertheless become historical.[3] God is infinite and eternal; man is an individual, particular existing being, "whose essential task cannot be to think sub specie aeterni,

---

[1] Journals, p. 386, #1084. [2] Postscript, p. 189.

[2] Ibid.

since as long as he exists as he is, though eternal, essentially an existing individual, whose essential task it is to concentrate upon inwardness in existing."[1] This is the absolute paradox, the apprehension of which calls forth faith as a responce to its absurdity. The only possible understanding we can have of the paradox is that it cannot be understood. While we may grow impatient with S.K.'s insistence that the absurd must be repellent to reason, we can only admit that he is accurately describing the essence of the concept of paradox. A paradox is the relationship in tension of two mutually contradictory ideas. We cannot understand a paradox, in the sense of reconciling the two opposites, if it is to remain a paradox. The only possible way one could undertake to explain the absolute paradox is by making it even more clear that it is a paradox.

Kierkegaard continues to deepen the paradox in every page of his writing. He conceives it as his function to make the paradox as absolute as possible. Consider for example the paradox of the foregiveness of sins. How can the sinner, subjectively conscious of his sinfulness, believe that he is forgiven by God? Sich an idea involves a relationship between God the eternal and man the exister, for forgiveness "purports to be an eternal decision in time with retroactive power to annul the past, and because it is linked with the existence of God in time."[2] But such an idea defies the understanding; it cannot be rationally understood. Forgive-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 195. [2] Ibid., p. 201.

ness is something that we experience when we are existing in faith. S.K. holds that the idea of the forgiveness of sins is directly opposed to the understanding, it can only be subjectively grasped in the inwardness of faith.

Since we have already seen that S.K.'s idea of faith is partly determined by its extreme opposition to knowledge this concept of the paradox should not come as a complete surprise. Faith is a passion, passion can be experienced only where there is objective uncertainty, and nothing can be more objectively uncertain than the eternal coming into time, God becoming man. We need to ask, however, at just what point faith arises. If the paradox of the God-Man is the essential core of Christianity, and if this paradox flouts the understanding, one might expect that one's reaction to it would be one of impatience or despair, rather than faith.

Kierkegaard faces this problem when he speaks of the possibility of the offense. By "offense" he means a temptation that might prevent one from making the movement of faith.[1] Our English language does not distinguish between the two kinds of temptation that are possible. We commonly think of a temptation as something that "seduces by the bait of pleasure," as Walter Lowrie very aptly phrases it. There is, however, a different kind of temptation which may deter us from what we know to be right by the threat of suffering. It is this second kind of temptation which S.K. speaks of in connection with the "offense." He has taken the term offense

---

[1]Lowrie, op. cit., p. 628.

from the New Testament passage in which Christ is called a "stumbling-block" to the Jews.[1] This term is sometimes translated "offense" and is synonymous for S.K. Since the paradox of God entering time defies our understanding we are likely to find it a stumbling-block, or an offense to faith. Thus when the claim is made to us that God came into the world in the lowly man Jesus we are apt to be offended in one of two ways. We may find the offense in the idea that eternal God should so lower himself as to take on the form of a man--and such a lowly man as that. Or we may find the offense in the idea that a mere man should claim to be almighty God. In each of these reactions to the paradox there is a common element--an involuntary withdrawal at this offense to the understanding.

> The God-Man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox; hence it is quite clear that the understanding must come to a standstill before it. If a man does not notice the offense which has to do with loftiness, he will on the other hand discover that which has to do with lowliness.[2]

What does this offense mean in relation to faith? The possibility of the offense is always there whenever the individual is confronted by Christ. "The possibility of the offense," writes S.K., "is the crossways, or it is like standing at the crossways."[3] At this crossways the personality stands and there are two possible relationships to Christ

---

[1] I Corinthians 1:23.

[2] Søren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 85.

[3] Ibid., p. 83.

that can be forseen. It is not a question as to whether the individual will doubt or believe, but whether he will be offended or believe.[1] "From the possibility of the offense a man turns either to offense or to faith."[2]

Although this whole concept of the absurd and the possibility of the offense which it brings may seem to us totally unrelated to life, it did not seem so to Kierkegaard. It is a terrible thing that Jesus who was God was so badly treated by men. The crucifixion of God by men is a thought so contradictory that to think it requires one either to believe--that is make the the leap of faith--or despair and be offended.

> ....it can easily be seen here that the possibility of offence has to do with lowliness--with the fact that this infinitely exalted thing of being a Christian should be despised, derided, spat upon, and regarded as a crime. But if this relationship is the right one, if the man so ill treated is in truth a Christian, he thus resembles the pattern as nearly as it is possible for a man to resemble it. But the contradiction is that in which the possibility of offence consists: that one should be punished for doing well.[3]

Kierkegaard is speaking here of an attitude of the spirit and a response of the soul. Thus the idea of the offense is intricately bound up with the meaning of faith. If one is confronted by paradox (especially the Christian paradox) there is always the possibility of offense, of being repelled because one cannot understand with the mind. Yet precisely in the possibility of offense lies another possibility--that one will say with one's whole soul, "I believe!

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 117.

although it is something that I cannot understand, although it is something that is contrary to all reason."

> Now the question is, Wilt thou be offended, or wilt thou believe, If thou wilt believe, then thou must pass through the possibility of offense, accept Christianity on any terms....So, a fig for the understanding! So you say, "Whether it now is a help or a torment, I will one thing only, I will belong to Christ, I will be a Christian!"[1]

Kierkegaard was himself conscious of having willed to be a Christian in spite of the suffering involved. In one entry in his Journals he confesses that Regina could never have followed him when he began seriously to "steer out into reality and Christian suffering, where there is neither honour nor respect to be won."[2] In this case the possibility of the offense was that he might have been deterred from breaking his engagement by the suffering which he knew would follow. His answer to the claim of Christianity upon him was to "pass through the possibility of offense," and accept Christianity in faith. The experience was indelibly stamped on his soul. Much later he could write that a man's whole life is relativity and his labor for relative ends when he "so lives that he recognizes no higher standard for his life than that provided by the understanding."[3] Such a man must always estimate his probable profit and loss before he will undertake anything; his understanding must be fully satisfied and must provide the answer to his question, "why and wherefore."

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Journals, p. 275, #850.

[3] Training in Christianity, p. 118.

> It is different with the absolute. At the first glance the understanding ascertains that this is madness. To relegate a whole life to suffering, to immolation, is for the understanding mere madness. If I must subject myself to suffering, says the understanding, if I must sacrifice something, or in some way sacrifice myself, then I want to know what profit or advantage I can get out of it; otherwise I am crazy if I do it.[1]

Yet the Christian voluntarily undertakes his suffering, even though it constitutes a paradox to the understanding. "For the relative indicates a period within the temporal for the reward of labour; the absolute seeks only the eternal."[2] If therefore a man is asked to make a lifelong sacrifice the understanding will call it madness unless there is some reason in terms of satisfactions and rewards during his life time. When such an absolute demand is made the understanding "stands still," but whenever the understanding is thus baffled the possibility of offense is present. In other words, when the eternal makes a demand upon us there is always the possibility that we shall refuse to heed. If we are not to reject the demand of the eternal, faith must be present in the moment, for faith bears the seed of a new life.

In the moment when the individual stands confronted by the absolute Christian paradox, the God-Man, he only achieves faith by a "leap." This is Kierkegaard's expression for the sudden movement that brings about a fundamental change in existence. The concept of the leap has a much wider philosophical application and physical application than we can concern ourselves with in this paper.[3] We are concerned

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 121.

[3] Swenson, op. cit., pp. 108-109, and footnote 19, has

particularly to understand the concept in its relation to religious decision.

The leap, or choice, takes place in the Moment when one subjectively apprehends the meaning of the absolute paradox. The Moment, in turn, is thus decisive for eternity. S.K.'s thought about the Moment is difficult to arrange in any systematic way. By it he seems to mean the interval of time when the eternal is present for an individual.

> Such a moment has a peculiar character. It is brief and temporal indeed, like every moment; it is transient as all moments are; it is past, like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive, and filled with the eternal. Such a moment ought to have a distinctive name; let us call it the Fullness of Time.[1]

In this Moment a choice is presented to the individual. When the individual, by an act of will, chooses the paradox faith is born.

There seems to be some contradiction in S.K.'s thought as to the part played by the will in connection with faith. At several points he suggests that faith is brought about by an act of the will. In the Journals, for example:

> Faith, surely, implies an act of the will, and moreover not in the same sense as when I say, for instance, that all apprehension implies an act of will; how can I otherwise explain the saying in the New Testament that whatsoever is not of faith is sin.[2]

On the other hand, he specifically states in the Fragments

---

a discussion of S.K.'s broader application of this concept of the "leap."

[1]Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 13.

[2]Journals, p. 3, #10. Cf. Romans 14:23.

that "faith is not an act of will."[1] Faith follows an act of will if the proper condition is present. The emphasis upon faith as a gift of God is more predominant than the emphasis upon faith as an act of the will. The above quotation from his Journals was written early in his life; toward the end of his life he places greater emphasis upon faith as the gracious gift of God.

In the Fragments he makes it clear that in the Moment one is faced with a decision that must be met by an act of will, but whether or not this decision will result in faith depends upon whether God (the Teacher) has given the condition. In the following passage he discriminates his own position sharply with that of Socrates.

> Now if we assume that it is as we have supposed (and without this assumption we return to the Socratic order of things), that the Teacher himself contributes the condition to the learner, it will follow that the object of faith is not the teaching but the Teacher. The Socratic principle is, that the learner being himself the Truth and in possession of the condition can thrust the teacher aside....But faith must steadily hold fast to the Teacher. In order to have the power to give the condition the Teacher must be God; in order that he may be able to put the learner in possession of it he must be Man. This contradiction is again the object of faith, and is the Paradox, the Moment. That God has once for all given man the requisite condition is the eternal Socratic presupposition, which comes into no hostile collision with time, but is incommensurable with the temporal and its determinations. The contradiction of our hypothesis is that man receives the condition in the Moment, the same condition which as being requisite for the understanding of the eternal Truth, is eo ipso an eternal condition.[2]

In spite of the difficulties of terminology in the above passage we must strive to understand it. Perhaps it is

---

[1] Fragments, p. 50. [2] Ibid.

as close as we can come to the central idea of S.K.'s thinking on the subject of the Moment. The Moment is a "moment of eternity between two moments of time,"[1] to use Chaning-Pearce's phrase. In that moment of eternity man receives the condition, or is permitted, to catch a glimpse of eternal truth. He receives the condition, however, only when he has chosen belief in the absurd fact of the paradox rather than offense at the paradox. This initial choice is what constitutes the "leap," while whatever follows the leap is in the hands of God. In this way faith is God's gift to him who subjectively, with infinite personal passionate interest chooses the Paradox. It is perhaps not false to Kierkegaard's thought to assemble thus the various phases of his concept of faith.

That faith is something which follows as a gift the initial act of trust is made abundantly clear in several of S.K.'s specifically religious writings. In a sermon on I Timothy 3:16, "He Was Believed on in the World," Kierkegaard reveals that he himself has made the uncertain leap of faith.

> For I have not held at arm's length year after year, waiting for new and ever new security in order to dare to believe; no, by an eternal decision I have secured my life by believing on Him--if He is a delusion, my life is lost. But this is not so, for I believe. I have already encountered, therefore, and sustained the temptation involved in staking all upon uncertainty, which is what faith is. But faith has conquered, I believe on Him. Will any one say to me, "But if!", that is something I no longer understand. I understand it once at the instant of decision, now I understand it no more.... I ventured out so far (that is what venturing properly means), no I believe.[2]

---

[1] Op. cit., p. 30.

[2] Søren Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 244.

The agonizing side of this Moment is described in another of his religious writings. His theme is that "It is the Spirit that giveth life," but that the Spirit cannot come until one first dies to "every merely earthly hope, to every merely human confidence." Then when the Spirit comes it brings faith, "that only being in the strictest sense faith which is the gift of the Holy Spirit after death has come between."[1] It will be noticed that in these religious writings Kierkegaard's language is exceedingly different than in the philosophical works. It is warmer, less abstract, and more specifically Christian. In the passage under consideration he goes on to define faith. We recognize it as the same kind of thing we have been reading in the Postscript and the Fragments but how much more personal it is!

> For we men are not so precise in the use of words, we often speak of faith when in the strictest Christian sense it is not faith. In every man, with difference due to natural endowment, a stronger or weaker spontaneity (immediacy) is born. The stronger, the more vitally powerful it is, the longer it can hold out against opposition. And this power of resistance, this vital confidence in oneself, in the world, in mankind, and (among other things) in God, we call faith. But this is not using the word in a strictly Christian sense. Faith is against understanding, faith is on the other side of death. And when thou didst die, or didst die to thyself, to the world, thou didst at the same time die to all immediacy in thyself, and also to thine understanding. That is to say, when all confidence in thyself or in human support, and also in God as an immediate apprehension, when every probability is excluded, when it is dark as in the dark night--it is in fact death that we are describing--then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith.[2]

---

[1]Søren Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 100.

[2]Ibid., p. 101.

In such passages from the religious writings we have descriptions of faith that spring more from S.K.'s deep personal piety than from his intellect. Although he scorned the Hegelian speculative philosophy because it soared far above actual human existence and floated around in the realm of pure thought, S.K. himself came periously near the same error. Much of what he has to say about faith we find difficult to relate to human existence as we know it. Perhaps the fault is ours--that we have not yet died to "immediacy," or that we still require something to believe in which is in the realm of the probable.

It will be well at this point to summarize briefly some of the ideas we have assembled about the central idea of faith. We began by distinguishing between subjectivity and objectivity in one's approach to his world, indicating that faith has to do with the former. When the existing thinker subjectively becomes concerned with his eternal happiness he has moved at least one step in the direction of faith. He discovers then that the truth which concerns his existence is a revealed truth, a truth that is objectively uncertain. This objective uncertainty is intensified in the Absolute Paradox and becomes Absurd to the understanding. Because it is the Absurd it contains for the subjective inquirer the possibility of the Offense. When the existing individual is confronted by the Absurd he may react either negatively or positively, he may be offended by the radical affront to his reason and understanding, or he may say "I believe in spite of its absurdity." In the latter case he passes through the possibility of of-

fense, makes the movement of faith, and in that Moment is given the condition by which faith is granted. In the Moment man receives a new nature from God; he understands the truth because God gives him the condition for understanding the truth.

Thus far we have been chiefly concerned to examine the foundations of faith in the Kierkegaardian sense of that term. In order to further our understanding we must now consider some of the results of faith, what it leads to in the religious and ethical life. Perhaps the most frequent comment of S.K. on this point is his insistence that faith does not bring a sense of security and equilibrium. Quite to the contrary, inasmuch as faith is faith in the paradox it must maintain itself with passion. We have referred somewhat to this idea in an earlier section of this chapter, but here we must give it full recognition.

The man of faith is constantly striving, constantly in the process of becoming. "Thus constantly to be in process of becoming is the elusiveness that pertains to the infinite in existence."[1] Wherever the infinite impinges upon the finite there is creative energy at work. In the consciousness of the infinite we experience the insecurity of life; those things which in our duller moments we know to be the most certain become, in the aspect of the eternal, the most transitory. Yet an existing individual cannot live constantly in the eternal, he can only strive constantly to arrive. For

---

[1] Postscript, p. 79.

the man who has faith all of life is subject to a dialectic. There is nothing so certain that it does not come under the uncertainty of death, for example. Such uncertainty is enough to drive the sensuous man to despair, for such a man forever desires to have something complete and finished. "But this desire does not come from the good," says Kierkegaard.[1] As long as an individual is to remain subjectively aware of his status as an exister he must sharpen his sense of the uncertainty, risk, and insecurity of life. As long as an individual is an existing subject he will know that existence and objective security are incompatible.

> Faith always gives thanks, is always in peril of life, in this collision of finite and infinite which is precisely a mortal danger for him who is a composite of both. The probable is therefore so little to the taste of a believer that he fears it most of all, since he well knows that when he clings to probabilities it is because he is beginning to lose his faith.
>
> Faith has in fact two tasks: to take care in every moment to discover the improbable, the paradox; and then to hold it fast with the passion of inwardness.[2]

We must not think that S.K. advocates a simple life of steady growth expressed in a mere widening of the moral horizon. The constant state of becoming in the sense of which he speaks is a radical insecurity which shakes the foundations of every stability we seek in complacency. We give expression to this crucial aspect of existence in moments of high religious passion or deep suffering, but we need to live more constantly where the eternal comes into relation with time. Kierkegaard plainly indicates the difficulty of being in the world yet not of it:

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

> What serves to mark the thoroughly cultivated personality is the degree to which the thinking in which he has his daily life has a dialectical character. To have one's daily life in the decisive dialectic of the infinite, and yet continue to live: this is both the art of life and its difficulty. Most men have complacent categories for their daily use, and resort to the categories of the infinite only upon solemn occasions; that is to say, they do not really have them. But to make use of the dialectic of the infinite in one's daily life, and to exist in this dialectic, is naturally the highest degree of strenuousness; and strenuous exertion is again needed to prevent the exercise from deceitfully luring one away from existence, instead of providing a training in existence.[1]

In the same context S.K. speaks of "the Deity, who is present as soon as the uncertainty of all things is thought infinitely." The implication seems to be that the opposite is also true: as soon as anything is thought to be certain the dialectic quality of life is denied and God is excluded. "Let it be a word, a proposition, a book, a man, a fellowship, or whatever you please: as soon as it is proposed to make it serve as limit, in such a way that the limit is not itself again dialectical, we have superstition and narrowness of spirit."[2] It is the human tendency to search for something so certain and fixed that it cannot be questioned that S.K. so heartily opposes. Certainty removes the necessity for striving and thus proves a traitor to the very essence of existence. It is God's purpose for us that we always strive; when we cease to strive we "attempt to cheat God of each moment's strenuous reacquisition of that which has once been acquired."[3]

We may well wonder what the modern generation can do

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 79-80, footnote.

[2] Ibid., p. 35, footnote. [3] Ibid.

with such a doctrine of uncertainty. Yet it is true that in the recent years of external insecurity the idea has found willing listeners who earlier would have turned deaf ears. When all around us the categories we have considered permanent are changing rapidly, when infallible ideas and infallible institutions are proving fallible--then we do not turn so quickly away when we are told that faith is a constant struggle and that Christianity involves an endless effort. One of S.K.'s best known comments on the meaning of faith is not so remote from our own experience today:

> In case one were to say that to swim is to lie upon dry land and flounder about, everybody would regard him as mad. But to believe is exactly like swimming, and instead of helping a man to get his feet on dry land the orator should help him to get out upon the deep. So then if one would say that to believe is to lie upon dry land and go through the motions, he says the same thing as the above, only people perhaps do not notice it.... For a finite being... the negative infinitive is the highest attainable, and the positive is a precarious assurance. Intellectual existence, especially for the religious man, is not easy, the believer lies constantly out upon the deep and with seventy thousand fathoms of water under him. However long he may lie out there, there is no assurance that little by little he will find himself lying upon land, stretched out as his ease. He may become calmer, more accustomed to his position, and find a sense of security which loves jest and the joyous mind--but up to the last minute he lies above a depth of seventy thousand fathoms.[1]

In another book Kierkegaard describes the timid man who must always seek after probabilities. Such a man is like a wader who feels the way cautiously with his foot lest he venture beyond his depth. So the prudent man gropes his way in the "relam of the probable, and finds God where the probabilities are favorable."[2] How different is the man of faith who

---

[1] Stages, pp. 401-402. [2] Postscript, p. 208.

courageously swims out to experience "the peril of lying upon the deep, the seventy thousand fathoms, in order there to find God."[1]

If tension and uncertainty are among the chief attributes of Christian faith, as S.K. so frequently intimates, what does this fact mean for life? It means that intellectually one will not desire to construct the perfect system of truth. One will realize that eternal truth must always remain a paradox from the viewpoint of finite man. It may be possible to erect a logical system as long as one is willing to abstract oneself from existence entirely, but is in never possible to formulate an existential system. This does not mean, however, that an existential system does not exist--it does, but only for God.

> System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen, from a purely abstract point of view, that system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing. Existence separates, and holds the various moments of existence discretely apart; the systematic thought consists of the finality which brings them together.[2]

The subjective thinker, existing in the tension of faith, will rigorously remind himself that every established order is precarious. More than this he will live in the consciousness that death hangs over life at every moment. There is a fearful urgency about being thus constantly aware of God's claim upon one. H. R. Mackintosh has caught the nearly pathological character of the God-relationship in S.K.'s mind when he

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 107.

writes,

> ...the Absolute, by which alone man can live, is a burden to him--God is his malady....The Eternal is at once the sheet-anchor of our being and its torture. The only escape for human personality, held captive by its very constitution in the endless tension of antithesis, lies through the strait gateway of ever-renewed decision for God.[1]

Kierkegaard addresses himself to the problem of relative versus the absolute end in a stimulating chapter in the Postscript and in the little devotional book, Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing. The chapter in the Postscript bears the heading, "The Initial Expression," and is the philosophical basis of the concepts of which Purity of Heart is the personal and devotional expression.

The person who has made the leap of faith realizes that his eternal happiness, his relationship to the Eternal, is the highest good. "Now if for any individual an eternal happiness is his highest good, this will mean that all finite satisfactions are volitionally relegated to the status of what may have to be renounced in favor of an eternal happiness."[2] The "highest good" can never be just one good among other goods; it must be the highest in the sense that everything else will be sacrificed for it. Speaking of the highest good Kierkegaard writes:

> Ordinarily, people have a horror of denying that such a good exists; so they include it among the other goods of life, and show precisely by so including it that they do not lay hold of it. I do not know whether to laugh or to weep over the customary rigmarole: a good living, a pretty wife, health, a social position on a level with an alder-

---

[1] Op. cit., p. 239.

[2] Postscript, p. 350.

> man--and then, too, an eternal happiness; which is as if one were to suppose the kingdom of heaven to be one among the kingdoms of this earth, and to seek information about it in a text-book of geography.[1]

Only the individual in his solitude can truly know whether he is so related to his eternal happiness that it is the highest good for him. If there is anything that he is unwilling to give up for the sake of his relationship to God, then God is not the highest good for him--this is the only sure test. We should keep in mind the previous discussion of the uncertainty of all life, for this devotion to the absolute telos, as S.K. terms it, is not something achieved once and for all time. One must forever be renewing one's devotion to the absolute and testing one's relationship to lesser ends to be certain they have not become determinative. The individual must "submit his entire immediacy with all its yearnings and desires to the inspection of resignation. If he finds a single hard spot, a point of resistance, it means that he does not have a relationship to an eternal happiness."[2]

There is no doubt that S.K. seriously meant what he said about resignation. He practiced it himself in many ways, and conceived his entire life as a renunciation for the sake of an absolute telos.

This does not seem the place to discuss at greater length Kierkegaard's treatment of relative ends and the absolute end. It is sufficient to notice that the individual who exists in faith does not fool himself into thinking that the

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 353.

absolute end becomes concrete in relative ends, and that he therefore can meet his obligation by expending his energy in pursuit of those relative ends. The relative ends cannot be particular manifestations of the absolute ends, "for the absolute distinction that was fixed between them in the moment of resignation will secure the absolute telos against fraternization every moment."[1] It remains the task of the individual who has faith to live in the relative ends (in the world) with his steps directed toward the absolute end (toward the Eternal), but with caution lest he exhaust himself in the relative ends. Above all he must not allow the principle of "mediation" to encroach upon his loyalty to the absolute. "Mediation is a rebellion of the relative ends against the majesty of the absolute, an attempt to bring the absolute down to the level of everything else...seeking to make man a mere servant of relative ends."[2] Perhaps we would call this simply compromise.

After reading the chapter on "Initial Expression" one wishes one could find its contents translated into more concrete terms. A partial asnwer to this wish is the little volume called Purity of Heart, in which S.K. personally suggests some of the things involved in absolute devotion to the Good. One must will the Good without calculating the reward or the dangers. We find an echo of S.K.'s previous thought about the temptation that deters from faith because of fear of suffering. Then there is the "ego-centric service of the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 359. [2] Ibid., p. 375.

Good," which constitutes a serious diversion from willing the Good. Faith should bring one to the point of commitment, loyalty, readiness to suffer all in the service of the Good. Such are the partial contents of this unique little book. It has a very direct bearing upon the results of single hearted faith. There is little in it to remind the reader of the austere Kierkegaard who seems to advocate the complete overthrow of reason as a prerequisite for faith.

A discussion of Kierkegaard's concept of faith could in no sense be complete without reference to the book Fear and Trembling. Although the book was written earlier in his life than most of the works we have been considering, we have left it until last because it comes more naturally under the category of the results of faith. The Christian paradox of the God-Man is not found in this treatment of faith, but Kierkegaard deals at great length with other paradoxes, the "teleological suspension of ethics," and the "infinite resignation."

The lyrical theme of the book is the Bible story of the test to which the Lord put Abraham in commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Around this simple story Kierkegaard weaves his reflections concerning the meaning of faith. Isaac becomes for him the symbol for the most precious possession of a man's life, the thing it would cost the greatest suffering to renouce. God's command to sacrifice Isaac becomes the absolute imperative that requires of man his highest allegiance. We should not expect to find the idea of faith in

this book consistent at all points with what we have seen it to be in his later writings. Kierkegaard was not systematic because he was constantly growing. Thus in Fear and Trembling resignation, infinite resignation, is a determining category for faith. Infinite resignation goes before faith here, while in the Postscript the individual must already possess faith if he is to be able to renounce everything.[1]

What does infinite resignation mean as we find it exemplified in this story of Abraham and Isaac? It is the step which precedes faith, a step which everyone can make if they so desire. Abraham showed that he had made the movement of infinite resignation when he set out for the mountain three days journey away to sacrifice his beloved son. S.K. believes that there is frequently confusion between the act of will by which we prove ourselves willing to renounce everything in obedience to God's command, and the act of faith by which we believe that everything will be returned. Resignation comes first, the actual willingness to let everything go, knowing that it will never be received back again. It is plain that if one entertains the slightest hope or expectation that what one renounces will be restored--then one has not made an infinite resignation.

---

[1]Note in this connection the following passages: From the Postscript, "If the idea of an eternal happiness does not transform his existence absolutely, he does not stand related to it; if there is anything he is not willing to give up for its sake, the relationship is not there." (p. 352)

And from Fear and Trembling, p. 65, "Resignation does not imply faith, for what I obtain in resignation is my eternal consciousness, and this is a purely philosophical movement which I have the courage to make whenever it is demanded of me...."

When one has made an infinite resignation one is ready for the next step. Abraham first gave up Isaac, being absolutely certain that he was lost, then by making the movement of faith he was able to believe in the absurd. The absurd in this case is the idea that even though Isaac is lost he will yet be restored. It is the sequence of these movements that seems to be of great importance to Kierkegaard.

> It needs a purely human courage to be able to renounce all temporality in order to gain eternity, but this I achieve...; but it needs the paradox and the most humble courage to seize upon the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this courage is the courage of faith. It was not by faith that Abraham renounced Isaac, but by faith that Abraham obtained Isaac.[1]

In an extremely intricate projection of thought Kierkegaard thus trys to analyze the spiritual and psychological movements that take place when an individual commits himself absolutely to God. Faith is not simply wishful thinking of the part of a person who would like to enrich his life is a semi-worldly sense. It is rather a radical loyalty which presupposes a total separation from all finite entanglements.[2] After such a total resignation has been made it is possible by faith in the absurd to live again in the finite world, although one's relationship to the finite is now only tentative. This is essentially the same idea we found in the Postscript concerning how one can be absolutely devoted to the highest good and yet live one's life among relative ends.

---

[1] Fear and Trembling, p. 66.

[2] Swenson, op. cit., p. 144.

When one has made an infinite resignation one is ready for the next step. Abraham first gave up Isaac, being absolutely certain that he was lost, then by making the movement of faith he was able to believe in the absurd. The absurd in this case is the idea that even though Isaac is lost he will yet be restored. It is the sequence of these movements that seems to be of great importance to Kierkegaard.

> It needs a purely human courage to be able to renounce all temporality in order to gain eternity, but this I achieve...; but it needs the paradox and the most humble courage to seize upon the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this courage is the courage of faith. It was not by faith that Abraham renounced Isaac, but by faith that Abraham obtained Isaac.[1]

In an extremely intricate projection of thought Kierkegaard thus trys to analyze the spiritual and psychological movements that take place when an individual commits himself absolutely to God. Faith is not simply wishful thinking of the part of a person who would like to enrich his life is a semi-worldly sense. It is rather a radical loyalty which presupposes a total separation from all finite entanglements.[2] After such a total resignation has been made it is possible by faith in the absurd to live again in the finite world, although one's relationship to the finite is now only tentative. This is essentially the same idea we found in the Postscript concerning how one can be absolutely devoted to the highest good and yet live one's life among relative ends.

---

[1] Fear and Trembling, p. 66.

[2] Swenson, op. cit., p. 144.

The second important problem of faith in Fear and Trembling is concerned with what Kierkegaard terms a teleological suspension of ethics. He states his purpose as follows:

> It is now my intention to draw out of the story of Abraham the dialectic which lies concealed within it.... in order to discover what a tremendous paradox is faith, a paradox which can transform a murder into a holy act pleasing to God, a paradox by which Isaac is returned to Abraham, a paradox which no thought can encompass because faith begins where thought leaves off.[1]

There are certain ethical requirements which constitute a universal law for all people. Such requirements are valid at every moment. In ordinary life the Individual defines his ethical task as a responsibility to the universal. It follows that to sin on the ethical plane is to assert one's individuality as over against the universal. "Each time the Individual, after entering the universal, feels compelled to assert himself as Individual, he is in a tribulation from which he cannot escape except by repentance and by renouncing himself as Individual in the universal."[2] S.K. then poses for himself the question as to whether the ethical is the highest that man and his existence can know. If the universal is the highest then it is the absolute for man, which means that ethical conduct according to recognized universal laws is man's highest achievement. Such an idea is intolerable for Kierkegaard. If the universal is the highest telos of man Abraham was nothing better than a murderer, for did he not disobey (or was he not at least willing to dis-

---

[1] Fear and Trembling, p. 74. [2] Ibid., p. 75.

obey) the universal ethical command "Thou shalt not kill?"

No, there is something higher for man than the universal, and the paradox of faith discovers to us what it is.

> For if ethics (i.e. morality) is the highest, and nothing incommensurable remains in man except it be evil (i.e. the particular which ought to be expressed in the universal), then there is no need for any other categories besides those of Greek philosophy and those which can be logically deduced from them.[1]

Faith is a paradox, the paradox that "the Individual as Individual is superior to the universal." It is possible that an individual, standing in an absolute relationship to the absolute, may be required to act in a way that contradicts the universal. Thus Abraham out of his sense of absolute obligation to God felt he must transcend his ethical obligation to the universal. From the standpoint of ethics his willingness to sacrifice Isaac was sin; his action cannot be justified as long as one must remain in the realm of ethics. It is just here that the difference lies between Abraham, and any number of "tragic" heroes.

Kierkegaard describes three tragic heroes for the purpose of contrasting them with Abraham, a knight of faith. When Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia to appease the wrath of the gods he transgressed one ethical standard (the killing of his daughter) in order to meet the demands of a higher ethical standard (the safety of a whole nation); it can not be said, therefore, that Agamemnon was superior to the universal. On the contrary, it was because he felt an obliga-

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

tion to a higher claim in the universal that he over-stepped a lesser claim. Again, when Jephthah offered the life of his daughter in payment of a sacred vow he was still in the ethical, which is proved by the fact that everyone honored him for keeping his vow. Finally, when Brutus was charged with the execution of Roman justice upon his own son he was admired for his loyalty to a higher ethical demand. In each case "the tragic hero remains within the domain of morality. He gives to an expression of ethics a τελος in a still higher expression of ethics."[1] How different the tragic hero is from the knight of faith S.K. indicates throughout the book.

Abraham is different from the tragic hero because in his commitment to a higher telos outside the ethical, he actually suspended ethics. For, writes Kierkegaard,

> ...I would like to know how it is possible to discover any point of contact between what Abraham did and the universal, other than that he overstepped it. There was no question of saving a nation, or of defending the idea of the state, or of appeasing the anger of the gods.... his entire action stands in no relation to the universal and remained a purely personal undertaking.[2]

Abraham requires that we place him in a different category than the tragic hero. "The tragic hero abandons certainty for a greater certainty and one can watch him with confidence."[3] Most of us live our lives in the realm of the purely ethical and find it quite difficult to understand Abraham who, because of his relationship to the absolute,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 83.

[2] Ibid., pp. 83-84.

[3] Ibid., p. 83.

abandoned the universal in faith "in order to grasp something still higher, which is not the universal."[1] This is a paradox which affronts the understanding. One cannot explain how it happens except to admit that one cannot become a knight of faith by one's own strength. Yet in spite of the fact that such faith is a miracle everyone can have it, because faith is a passion and all men can have passion.

Kierkegaard's central thought on this problem can best be expressed in his own summary statements.

> The paradox of faith, then, is that the Individual is superior to the universal, that the Individual...determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, and not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can be expressed in still another way by saying that there exists an absolute duty towards God; for in this duty, the Individual as Individual is held in an absolute relation to the absolute.[2]

> Let us then examine a little more closely the distress and dread of the paradox of faith. The tragic hero renounces himself in order to express the universal; the knight of faith renounces the universal in order to become the Individual.[3]

It is a difficult problem to discover the exact relationship of the idea of faith in Fear and Trembling to the idea found in S.K.'s later writing. Faith, in the sense that Abraham possessed it, did not have as its object the paradox of God appearing in history in the person of Christ. Thus the question "Can an eternal happiness be based upon something historical" does not arise here, as it did several years later in the Fragments and in the Postscript. In the last two books

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 100.

[3] Ibid., p. 109.

Kierkegaard was evidently trying to come to grips with the Christian faith and its central object of faith, Jesus Christ. It shall be the task of the next chapter to decide how true he was to the best in Christian tradition.

The dominant characteritsic of faith as Kierkegaard has described it is irrational belief in absolute paradox. Faith is not the simple acceptance of the doctrine of Christianity. When the emphasis is thus placed on the doctrine one's attention is at once directed outward in the effort to determine exactly what the doctrine is. Any desire to determine the exact content of Christian doctrine "begins the erudite, the anxious, the timorous effort at approximation."[1] Concern chiefly about the exact nature of the doctrine, the acceptance of which determines whether one has faith, effectively prevents any real decision. Neither is is true that faith depends upon the way in which one appropriates the Christian doctrine. Advocates of this point of view would say that if one appropriates the doctrine and is then prepared to live and die for it--this is faith. Kierkegaard warns, however, that devoted loyalty to a doctrine is not necessarily an exclusively Christian phenomenon. What this idea of faith lacks is specificity. Christian faith must be seen in a category so specifically different that it cannot possibly be confused with anything else. What then is the determining characteristic of Christian faith? Kierkegaard describes it as follows:

---

[1] Postscript, p. 537.

> The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness. The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian. This how can only correspond with the one thing, the absolute paradox. There is therefore no vague talk to the effect that being a Christian is to accept, and to accept, and to accept quite differently, to appropriate, to believe, to appropriate by faith quite differently (all of them purely rhetorical and fictitious definitions); but to believe is specifically different from all other appropriations and inwardness. Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree. This formula fits only the believer, no one else, not a lover, not an enthusiast, not a thinker, but simply and solely the believer who is related to the absolute paradox.1

Within the passage just quoted are to be found the essential elements of faith as Kierkegaard understood them. One sentence contains as complete a definition as we can find anywhere in his thought: "Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree." Faith is objectively uncertain, hence it is foolish and contradictory to seek proofs with which to bolster faith. Furthermore, faith depends upon one's response to the absurd, the paradox, the absolutely contradictory fact that the eternal which has nothing to do with the historical nevertheless becomes historical. At this point we find all the irrationalism of Kierkegaard focused. But still we have not reached the real essence of faith which is that one embraces the paradox, the absurd, with passion. One must not attempt to resolve the paradox, to explain it,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 540.

but on the contrary must strive to deepen it, to preserve it as an absolute contradiction. The tension that results from this passionate embrace is faith, and the only understanding one can have of faith is to know that one cannot understand it.

It may occur to the reader of Kierkegaard that he himself was inconsistent in his emphasis upon the futility of attempting to understand the paradox. He asserts that the paradox is absurd by definition, an affront to reason and the understanding, yet he wrote heavy volumes in the effort to explain it. There is a sense, however, in which he was true to his central affirmations about faith--that it is a personal, dialectical, passionate series of decisions in which one is constantly aware of the paradoxical uncertainty of life in its existential aspects.

It seems appropriate to bring this chapter to a close with a discriminating, yet sympathetic, description of Kierkegaard written by Jacques Maritain. This Catholic theologian has understood the intricate relationship between Kierkegaard's suffering as a man, his thinking as a philosopher-theologian, and his deep piety as a religious individual. Maritain's words are a suitable conclusion to the chapter.

> Kierkegaard's drama consisted of rediscovering the absolute faith by turning against, even if it bruised him most cruelly, the whole universe of Hegelianism, in the midst of which, however, his mind continued to breathe; he turned against the very root of this universe, against the idea that the supreme moment of dialectic and the supreme judgment of things of the spirit belong to philosophy and not to religion. Kierkegaard appeared under

many guises because he lived in the midst of contradiction and because the burning intuition within him, that he wanted to manifest to men, on all sides met with impossibilities--the impossibilities that Hegelian reason built around him. This intuition could not be conceptualized into a doctrine, it reverberated into symbolic attempts and contrasting figures. With his brilliant and many-sided intelligence, Kierkegaard was neither professional philosopher or theologian. He was a restless and suffering man, attracted by the world and tormented by the longing for holiness, and singularly rich in mystical gifts and insights.... Truly speaking there is for Kierkegaard only one problem, the problem of faith; but it was postulated for him in tragic terms. For on one hand, it is by denying the world of reason and logic, the value of which he knew so well, however, but incarnate to his mind in Hegel, that he was able to affirm the reality of faith.... His personal experience....played a decisive role.... His profound sense of the impenetrable mystery of faith within us, and the disproportion between divine things and the entire collection of what is visible and of human significances, even within consciousness, led him, under the impulse of this experience, as under the influence of his irrationalism, to think that the man of faith necessarily lives in a cricifying doubt in regard to faith itself--it would be a blasphemy of faith to believe that one has it--and led him to condemn as an idol of human security all that is solidly established, assured, and enjoyed even in divine certitudes.[1]

---

[1]Jacques Maritain, et. al., Religion and the Modern World, University of Pennsylvania Bicentennial Conference (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), pp. 4-6.

CHAPTER THREE

KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF FAITH COMPARED WITH TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES OF FAITH

There is no doubt that Søren Kierkegaard's emphasis upon faith as an inner experience is in harmony with the best of Christian thought throughout the history of Christianity. When Christian thinking about faith has been true to the spirit of the founder of Christianity it has emphasized the subjective relationship of the individual to God through Jesus Christ. It is, however, only a general tendency in Kierkegaard toward the emphasis of the inner experience of faith that is consistent with a general Christian idea of faith. Christianity is agreed with S.K. in designating faith as the subjective experience of the individual, but it is opposed to Kierkegaard in its description of the content of this experience.

If we were to try to abstract the essence of the meaning of faith for Christians we would inevitably find ourselves using such words as trust, confidence, assurance, conviction, certainty, and peace. Yet in out reading of Kierkegaard's thought these qualities of the human spirit are, so far from being evidences of faith, conceived as indications that faith is not present. Faith, believes Kierkegaard, is conceived in dread and despair, born of absolute paradox, and

lived in the midst of the deepest spiritual suffering. It is of course true that S.K. can be quoted in favor of a less austere conception of the nature of faith. Especially in his religious writing do we find evidences of a deep-rooted trust and assurance that tends to mitigate somewhat the severity of his doctrine. Even in these writings, however, the note of paradox is ever present. In the second section of Christian Discourses, for example, the theme is the joy that is inherent in spiritual suffering. In seven discourses he meditates upon seven paradoxes--all under the general title, "Joyful notes in the strife of suffering."[1] By far the greater emphasis is placed upon the uncertainty and agony of faith.

There are frequent references in the Postscript to the fact that "the distinguishing mark of religious action is suffering."[2] Kierkegaard means inward suffering principally, but in the latter part of his life he also held that outward suffering (persecution, ridicule, etc.) were the distinguishing mark of the Christian. But in inward suffering the religious person finds his true existence.

> ...suffering as the existential expression for existential pathos means that suffering is real, or that the reality of the suffering constitutes the existential pathos; and by the reality of the suffering is meant its persistence as essential for the pathetic relationship to an external happiness. It follows that the suffering is not deceptively recalled, nor does the individual transcend it, which constitutes a retreat from the task, gained by managing in one way or another to get the scene shifted from existence to a fantastic medium.[3]

---

[1] Christian Discourses, pp. 99-163.

[2] Postscript, p. 387. [3] Ibid., p. 396.

The religious person apprehends his suffering as something essential to his stauts as a religious person. The fundamental difference between the religious person and the aesthetic person, insofar as suffering is concerned, is that the aesthetic person regards suffering as accidental, to be gone through and overcome, while the religious person regards suffering as the essential evidence of his religious life.

> When the Scriptures say that God dwells in a contrite heart, this does not represent a transitory or momentary relationship...but expresses on the contrary the essential significance of suffering for the God-relationship.[1]

Is this then the content of faith as traditional Christian thought has understood it? It may be true that Christianity has attributed the power to withstand suffering with greater courage. Also a deep religious faith has been thought to endow a person with increased sensitivity so that he would be more open to experiences of suffering. But has Christianity thought of suffering as absolutely essential and permanent in faith? It does not seem so. Kierkegaard asks himself the question whether an individual who is suffering religiously can, in his joy over the significance of his suffering as a sign of his relationship to God, transcend that suffering. S.K.'s own answer is no, because that would be to deny that suffering was essential. We therefore see an important difference between Kierkegaard and traditional Christianity in regard to the relationship between suffering and faith. S.K. says that faith is not faith if suffering is not

---

[1] Ibid., p. 399.

always present; historic Christianity has said that in faith one gains the strength to go through suffering and overcome it. We must leave the question open as to whether this fact convicts historic Christianity of remaining in the realm of aesthetics.

In the New Testament faith is variously conceived as trust in God and trust in Jesus, either as a leader or as the exalted Son of God. In Matthew 8:5-11, the story of the centurion who came to ask Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus refers to the man's great "faith." He very plainly means his confidence in Jesus or the power he is known to have. Hence in the early use of the word faith it indicates a relationship of confidence or trust between the individual and the being in whom he believes. One historical study of faith as a Christian idea divides the uses of the word faith in the Synoptic Gospels into three classes which seem to include nearly every use that is made of it.[1]

1. There are first those uses of faith as humble trust in God, as Father, who will hear and respond to men's prayers.
2. Faith may again mean belief in Jesus as the revealer of God through the divine acts which he performs.
3. Third, faith may mean confidence in the person of Jesus himself as a divine being.

It must be confessed that reading the Synoptic Gospels after Kierkegaard leaves some doubt as to whether the roots of his doctrine of faith are to be found there.

There are quite different interpretations of faith in

---

[1]Stewart Means, Faith: An Historical Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), pp. 49-50.

the New Testament aside from the Pauline Epistles and the Synoptics. The great passage on faith in Hebrews also sounds plainly out of harmony with Kierkegaard. In Hebrews faith is expressed in terms of conviction and assurance. Faith is almost an eschatological hope in the future fulfilment of God's promises to the Hebrews. Even the reference in Hebrews 11: 17-18 to Abraham's testing is quite simple and unadorned when compared with S.K.'s elaborate use of the incident. Abraham's faith "that God was able to raise men even from the dead"[1] is a simple, almost naive faith. It does not suggest an irrational, passionate embracing of the "absurd." Kierkegaard's suggestion that the knight of faith is outwardly not to be distinguished from any other person also oddly contradicts Hebrews. The men of faith pictured in Hebrews were set apart by their faith--did they not show greater endurance in suffering and torture, and did they not perform miracles by their faith? Finally, Jesus is portrayed not so much as the object of faith as the leader and perfector of the faith. The suggestion is that the faith was present before Jesus, but that Jesus, by his example, showed men how that faith might be made perfect.

In the Epistle of James faith is inextricably bound up with external good works. Hope and trust in the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom are the characteristics of faith in the letters of Peter. Finally, in Acts, faith is primarily obedience to and trust in the message that the earlier Gospel

---

[1]Hebrews 11:19 (Goodspeed).

preachers proclaimed.[1] In none of these do we find the specific sources of S.K.'s paradoxical faith.

The problem of the relation of Kierkegaard's thought on faith to the Pauline Epistles is exceedingly complex. We can do no more here than express a few tentative conclusions. In the first place, much of Paul's faith has for its historical object, or event, not the Incarnation but the Resurrection. His faith is usually related to Jesus as the Christ and sometimes signifies a kind of mystical union with him. In addition to this faith is directly related to the kind of moral life an individual lives.[1] Love springs from faith and results in an ethical consciousness. "...But we who belong to the day must be composed, wearing faith and love for a coat of mail, and helmeted with the hope of salvation."[2] In one of his greatest statements of faith Paul says:

> For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through your faith. For all of you who have been baptized into union with Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no room for "Jew" and "Greek"; there is no room for "slave" and "free-man";...for in union with Christ Jesus you are all one. And if you belong to Christ, then you are true descendants of Abraham and his heirs under the promise.[3]

Paul clearly indicates in this passage that faith is not something that the individual holds in social isolation, but a radical force which transforms the fundamental relationships of human society and demands an ethical response of the individual.

---

[1] II Corinthians 5:17, "So if anyone is in union with Christ, he is a new being; the old state of things has passed away."

[2] I Thessalonians 5:8. [3] Galatians 3:26-29.

However widely we read in the Pauline Epistles we do not find the basis for Kierkegaard's insistence upon the solitariness, the subjective doubt with respect to the possession of faith, and the deep suffering of faith. Faith as inward experience, as moving passion--these are present in Paul's conception of faith, but not the others. On the contrary there is always the feeling of joy in the possession of faith and assurance that one has been saved by faith. It is altogether a different spiritual climate in which we find ourselves from the tragic, brooding passion of Søren Kierkegaard.

In relation to the problem of essential suffering for the religious man Kierkegaard quotes Paul at one point.[1] The passage is in the twelfth chapter of II Corinthians where Paul refers to the "thorn in his flesh," a bitter physical affliction which was sent to him that he might not be too happy. The Apostle, says Kierkegaard, had at one time a tremendous spiritual experience. "What evidence did the Apostle retain to assure him of the reality of the experience? A thorn in the flesh--that is, an experience of sufferings."[2] S.K.'s exegesis of this passage may be legitimate, yet he overlooks Paul's words in the next few verses. Paul goes on to say that he rejoices in physical suffering, hardships, and persecution because in such weaknesses and difficulties he is made strong. In other words, Paul regards his suffering as essential, but in his rejoicing over the significance of that suffering is able to trasnmute it into a source of strength.

---

[1] Postscript, p. 406. [2] Ibid., p. 407.

As we have seen,[1] this is precisely what S.K. believes cannot be done. Yet Kierkegaard may be correct in interpreting this passage as an indication that Paul believed in the essential and permanent value of suffering for the religious individual. Here, at any rate, we come very close to finding some Biblical basis for S.K.'s description of the meaning of faith.

When we come to the Gospel of John we discover that the word faith ("Pistis") is not used at all. Instead a verb "to believe" is used to describe the reality of faith.[2] Thus there is a shifting of emphasis from the subjective content of the experience to the object of belief. God loved the world and sent his son "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish." It is not to be thought, however, that "believeing" means a purely intellectual assent. More than this it is a response of the whole personality and brings about a change in the whole personality. We understand believing in this sense to be the same as outgoing, responsive faith. All through the fourth Gospel is this emphasis upon believing as the basis of eternal life. Yet this is not what Kierkegaard means by believing; there is little suggestion in John of absolute paradox, the apprehension of which crucifies the understanding. In mood the Gospel of John is quite distinct from Kierkegaard. Belief "on the Lord Jesus Christ" brings richness and fulness of life, and more than that, a relationship to God through Christ. For S.K., however, belief in Christ meant belief in

---

[1]See p. 73 above.

[2]Means, op. cit., p. 74.

him as the God-Man, the historic moment when the eternal entered into time. Kierkegaard's doctrine is something more than the Logos doctrine in the first chapter of John, for although the paradox may be present in this chapter it is certainly not exalted and intensified as in Kierkegaard's thought. We must conclude that the idea of faith found in John provides no substantial ground for the doctrine of faith announced by Kierkegaard.

We have now briefly compared S.K.'s concept of faith with several of the principle ideas of faith found in the New Testament. In all these comparisons we have felt distinctly that we were moving in almost wholly different realms. It would seem right to expect that if Kierkegaard's concept of faith were in any substantial way based on the New Testament one would feel at least a correspondence in mood and feeling when one reads in both sources. That correspondence is conspicuously absent and one is left with no alternative but to conclude that Kierkegaard's concept of faith is not consistent with New Testament faith. It is true that nearly all of S.K.'s devotional and religious writings have for their texts New Testament passages. When one reads these addresses, however, one discovers that he weaves a pattern of words and ideas around the scriptural passages that is utterly out of touch with their essential meaning as critical scholars have understood them. This is not to say that S.K. does not give us many fresh insights and stirring interpretations. He does that. But he also ignores the historical setting of many

passages and comes perilously close to pure allegorizing. We must therefore thank him for jarring us out of our accustomed ways of thinking and feeling in relation to the Scriptures, but we must also turn elsewhere to discover the sources of his interpretation of faith.

St. Augustine was in many respects like Kierkegaard in the spiritual suffering he went through before he cam to a full acceptance of the Christian faith. He too progresses through several different intellectual phases--Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism--on his way to Christianity. It was necessary for him, as well as for S.K., to find some other way than pure rationalism to meet the questions of his soul. Yet while both men turned from speculation they ended at completely different points. Augustine turned finally to the authority of the Church as the custodian of doctrine, while S.K. made a more radical rejection of all external authority and preached subjectivity and an extreme individualism. Kierkegaard and Augustine thus appear fundamentally opposed to each other on the question as to what makes a man holy, Augustine claiming that it is his relationship to the divine institution of the Church[1], Kierkegaard holding that it is the manner in which he inwardly grasps the absolute paradox of human existence.

Is there any connection between Augustine and Kierkegaard in relation to the problem of faith? Augustine thought of faith as a gift of God bestowed upon man in order that he

---

[1]Ibid., p. 168.

may be in a condition to know the truth and know God. In this sense faith becomes almost a preliminary step, necessary before one can accept that which the authority of the Church offers as true.[1] There is some similarity between this conception of faith and that of Kierkegaard. For S.K. also, faith was a miracle of God which provided one with the condition of understanding something that would otherwise be an affront to reason. The difference lies in the "truth" that faith prepares one to receive, understand, and accept.

Faith is otherwise represented in Augustine as the hope of eternal life in the face of the evils of this world. Thus he writes that with regard to the supreme good Christianity believes,

> ...that life eternal is the supreme good, death eternal the supreme evil, and that to obtain the one and escape the other we must live rightly. And thus it is written, "The just lives by faith," for we do not as yet see our good, and must therefore live by faith....[2]

Following a long chapter in which he vividly recounts the many ills that human beings must put up with, Augustine concludes:

> And therefore the Apostle Paul...says, "For we are saved by hope: now hope which is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." As, therefore, we are saved, so we are made happy by hope. And as we do not as yet possess a present, but look for a future salvation, so it is with our happiness, and this "with patience;" for we are encompassed with evils, which ought patiently to endure, until we come to the ineffable

---

[1] Ibid., p. 170.

[2] The City of God, Book XIX, Ch. 4, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. by Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1887), II, p. 401.

> enjoyment of unmixed good; for there shall be no longer anything to endure.[1]

Strength to endure the hardship of the present and hope of a future blessed state--these are two of the fruits of faith as represented by Augustine in the above passages. Here again, however, is that anticipation of the time when suffering will end, and that trust that in faith we can endure anything. These ideas are at least not characteristic of S.K.'s thought, although both Augustine and Kierkegaard apparently believed suffering to be a part of the natural state of man as long as he exists in the finite world.

Perhaps the central theme of Augustine's idea of faith is found in his words, "For faith is understanding's step; and understanding faith's attainment."[2] It would be, however, an error to see in this dictum any similarity with Kierkegaard's passionate subjectivity with which one apprehends the paradox. Even when the words are nearly the same we feel an emotional difference between the two concepts of faith. The understanding to which one attains by faith was for Augustine an understanding of doctrinal truth; the understanding to which one attains was for Kierkegaard a negative understanding--one understood only that the essential paradox of existence could not be understood.

Both Augustine and Kierkegaard stressed the function of the will in the operation of faith. Augustine believed

---

[1] Ibid., p. 403.

[2] Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op. cit., VI, p. 481.

that faith was an act of will, but that God's grace was nevertheless operative on the will in order to make faith possible.[1] We have already seen that for S.K. one makes "the leap" to faith by a mighty effort of the will, in which, nevertheless, God is present and provides the condition. The act of the will in which faith is born is for S.K. the most decisive act of life and is the inevitable result of the effort to live existentially. One does not feel that the will has such radical significance in the thought of Augustine.

There is, however, a very great difference between Augustine and Kierkegaard in terms of their method and the final results of faith in relation to reason. S.K. could properly take his place as one of the most extreme members of what Gilson has called "the Tertullian family."[2] Although he might not qualify on all counts as a member of this family he would on the count of extreme opposition to reason. For the Tertullian family is characterized by "those theologians according to whom Revelation had been given to men as a substitute for all other knowledge, including science, ethics and metaphysics."[3] Both Augustine and the Tertullian family belong to the group for which faith is primary, but Augustine differs from the others in that he makes room for reason after faith. It is at this point that his opposition to

---

[1]Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), II, p. 100.

[2]Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 10.

[3]Ibid., p. 5.

Kierkegaard is most noticeable.

Augustine believed that the results of faith need in no sense be against the findings of reason, of philosophy. One could not begin with philosophy, but one naturally returned to philosophy after gaining faith. Faith was the prerequisite for understanding philosophy.

> We all remember the chapters in his Confessions, where Augustine relates how, after vainly trying to reach truth, and eventually faith, by means of reason alone, he had at last discovered that all the rational truth about God that had been taught by the philosophers could be grasped at once, pure of all errors, and enriched with many a more than philosophical truth by the simple act of faith of the most illiterate among the faithful. From that time on, Augustine was never to forget that the safest way to reach truth is not the one that starts from reason and then goes on from rational certitude to faith, but, on the contrary, the way whose starting point is faith and then goes on from Revelation to reason.[1]

Thus Augustine, in distinction from Kierkegaard, remained entirely sympathetic to the efforts of philosophy as long as those efforts were regarded in the light of faith. It was a marriage of theology and philosophy, of religious faith and rational speculation that Augustine believed he had achieved. Kierkegaard, however, remained hostile to speculation till the end. The faith of which he spoke did not provide a key for understanding speculation but instead only deepened the abyss between itself and reason.

Once again we are forced to conclude that Kierkegaard had not much in common with Augustine insofar as their respective doctrines of faith are concerned. It should be added, however, that there is less opposition between them than be-

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

tween S.K. and other concepts of faith within the general history of Christian doctrine. With Augustine began the long period in which faith was identified with the unconditional acceptance of the creed of the Church. Although this definition of faith is in one sense opposed to the rationalism of the 19th century, insofar as it required of people the unreasoned acceptance of a body of dogmatic belief, it is also opposed to S.K.'s major emphasis insofar as it concentrated the attention upon an objective creed. The important thing was to what one was related in faith, not to how one was related to it. It was the latter emphasis that Kierkegaard represented in the extreme. His words on this point are:

> When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.[1]

Kierkegaard could not remain content to count faith as the acceptance of the doctrine of the Church. Nor could faith be for him synonymous with any set of external acts such as baptism or communion. We would not expect, therefore, that his doctrine of faith would coincide with the doctrine of the authoritarian Church, which had its important initial impetus in Augustine. Neither would we expect S.K.'s notion

---

[1] Postscript, p. 178.

of faith to spring from the combination of revealed theology and natural theology of the Schoolmen. In all of these cases faith had principally to do with an objective set of doctrines and nothing could be farther from the spirit of Kierkegaard as we understand his thought. For, whether we choose to agree or not, Kierkegaard made himself clear when he wrote:

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there the most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.[1]

We shall pass over the long period of the Middle Ages with the knowledge that there is much that might have been of interest in relation to changing ideas of faith. There were perhaps few men in those centuries with whom Kierkegaard would have found himself congenial. It is no accident that we have no clear references to all the great church theologians of the Middle Ages in the works of Søren Kierkegaard. He could have had little patience with the sacramental legalism of the Church, or with the cold logic and passionless intellectualism of St. Thomas's system. Thus we come naturally to the next spiritual compatriot of Kierkegaard--Martin Luther.

Between the spiritual environment of Luther and that of Kierkegaard there is a striking resemblance. Both experienced in their childhood the warping effects of an extremely

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 179-180.

severe religious faith. For Kierkegaard the pressure came from a brooding and strict father, while for Luther it came from the total impact of his surroundings. Both men were all their lives extremely sensitive to the spiritual condition of their own souls, although S.K. was by far the more sensitive. Finally, both Luther and S.K. asked themselves constantly "How can I become a Christian?" It was this subjective, passionately personal orientation of their search for truth that constituted their psychological and spiritual affinity.

Into the monastery with him Luther took, as a young man, the then prevailing idea of God as an implacable judge, a righteous judge who threatened men for their ability to live up to the standard set for them. It is probable that there was a good deal of ambivalence in Luther's attitude toward God--a curious mixture of fear, perhaps even hate, yet also a feverish desire to know Him. It was the righteousness of God that terrified Luther, because he found himself so unrighteous before it. The thought continued to plague him: how can one be sure that one's contrition has gone deep enough to ensure the pardon of such a God of righteousness?

Against the background of his own inner conflict, and the current practice of the Church which placed such stress upon works, Luther came to believe that the only way to salvation was to renounce works and throw himself completely upon the free grace of God in Christ. Thus out of an intensely private, subjective, religious conflict grew his great idea of justification by faith alone. His major fear had been of the

righteousness of God conceived in a punitive sense, but now, in his wrestling with the 17th verse of the first chapter of Romans, Luther received a sudden and profound clarification. "The righteous shall live by faith" meant that God was ready to bestow righteousness on any who had faith. Righteousness in this sense is the free gift by which a merciful God justifies the sinner, through faith. Thus God's righteousness becomes the equivalent of God's grace and no longer has anything to do with retribution or punishment.

Under the influence of his new insight Luther held that faith was assent, intellectual and yet much more than intellectual, inspired by God, to the truth of the Gospel,

> ...to know and believe this only, that Christ is gone to the Father, and is not now seen; that he sitteth in heaven at the right hand of his Father, not as a judge, but made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption; briefly, that he is our high priest entreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by grace.[1]

We must note that faith is a gift of God, not simply another kind of human merit. God reveals himself as a gracious and loving father in Jesus Christ. To the man who is properly humble in the face of his own sin and failure the revelation calls forth an instinctive response. It is no merit of his that he believes, he cannot help believing when God's word comes to him.

We must pause at this point to note some difference between Luther and Kierkegaard that are already apparent. Perhaps the sharpest difference is at the point of the part

---

[1]Martin Luther, "Introduction" to A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1860), p. 135.

will plays in faith. From what has just been said of Luther it is plain that he believed man plays a passive role in the actual moment of the birth of faith. Faith is preceded by the sense of sin, in Luther's own personal experience a deep despair, but when the experience of faith comes it comes to a passive individual. For Kierkegaard God's word comes to the despairing individual in a moment of passionate decision; in Luther the experience is as far reaching in its effect upon the individual but there is no act of the will involved, or at least no act of the will that can compare with S.K.'s "leap." If one must assent to the truth of the Gospel, as Luther says one must, the will must play some part in the event. Yet Luther does stress the passivity of the man who is justified by faith alone. Christian righteousness, he writes,

> ...is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor consisteth in works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a mere passive righteousness, as others...are active. For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer another to work in us, that is to say, God. Therefore it seemeth good unto me to call this righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, the passive righteousness.[1]

There is also a difference between Luther and Kierkegaard in relation to the inner results of faith. Luther's faith brought him freedom from the doubt and despair that had tormented him for much of his life. He felt himself to be "most free lord of all and subject to none." His description of the inner status of the justified man is worth quoting:

---

[1] Ibid., p. 131.

> This is a spiritual power, which rules in the midst of enemies, and is powerful in the midst of distresses. And this is nothing else than that strength is made perfect in my weakness, and that I can turn all things to the profit of my salvation; so that even the cross and death are compelled to serve me and to work together for my salvation. This is a lofty and eminent dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual empire, in which there is nothing so good, nothing so bad, as not to work together for my good, if only I believe. And yet there is nothing of which I have need--for faith alone suffices for my salvation--unless that, in it, faith may exercise the power and empire of its liberty. This is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.[1]

We must contrast this obvious spiritual joy and confidence, this triumph in the face of whatever external suffering, with S.K.'s "lying upon the deep, the seventy thousand fathoms, in order there to find God."[2] Kierkegaard's faith brings on an intensified realization of the uncertain and paradoxical nature of human existence. Luther's faith, apparently, brings about a resolution of spiritual tension and conflict. Plainly there is an important difference. The greatest parallel between Luther and Kierkegaard is at the point of their joint emphasis upon despair as the no-man's land through which the individual must go to reach faith. The two men may part company when it comes to the question as to what happens in the moment that faith is conceived, and what the content of enduring faith is, but they are together in their emphasis upon despair and consciousness of sin as the preliminary stage to faith.

In Kierkegaard's writing there are frequent references

---

[1]Martin Luther, "Christian Liberty," in Luther's Primary Works, ed. by Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim (London: John Murray, 1883), p. 115.

[2]Cf. p. 55 above.

to Luther and Lutheranism. One of the most significant statements is found in his small book For Self-Examination. The first chapter, based on the twenty-second verse following of the first chapter of James, is given the title, "How to Derive True Benediction from Beholding Oneself in the Mirror of the Word." It is the first part of this chapter which is of particular interest as a clue to Kierkegaard's attitude toward Luther. S.K. begins with several comments upon the religious characteristics of the age just prior to Luther's life. It was a time in which good works had become more important than anything else. "And like unwholesome excrescences, upon trees, so were these works spoiled by unwholesome excrescences, which often were merely hypocrisy, the vain conceit of meritoriousness, or simple idleness."[1] Good works in themselves are not however an evil, but only insofar as they are performed in unwholesomeness and insincerity. Into this world, where "by their narrow-minded self-torture, people had...made God just as narrow-minded," came Martin Luther--from God and armed with faith. "With faith (for verily faith was needed for the task) or by faith he reinstated faith in its rights."[2] S.K. gives Luther a sly dig when he commented upon Luther's well known aversion to the Epistle of James.

> The danger was great. How great it was in Luther's eyes is shown most conspicuously by the conclusion he came to, that in order to put things to rights the Apostle James must be shoved aside. Just think of Luther's reverence

---

[1] For Self-Examination, p. 40.

[2] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

> for an Apostle!--and then that he must venture to do such a thing as this to get faith reinstated in its rights![1]

With characteristically shrewd psychological insight S.K. notes that people will accept either works which result in some merit, or faith and grace which carry no responsibility of works. They will not, however, make the combination of faith and works that Luther required in his most constructive thought. Here lies the source of the misinterpretation of Luther which began almost as soon as people began to take notice of him. Worldliness, says Kierkegaard, began to notice Luther.

> It listened, and it took the precaution to listen a second time for fear it might have heard amiss, and thereupon it said, "Capital! That suits us exactly. Luther says, 'It is faith alone that matters'...Let us take then his word, his doctrine--and we are liberated from all works, Long live Luther!"[2]

To the worldly mind it was "madness" that one saved by faith was yet still required to do works. "Yes, indeed, it is madness, so was true Lutheranism also, and so was Christianity." Kierkegaard's love of the paradoxical is revealed here again in his interpretation of Luther.

> Christianity's requirement is: Thy life shall as strenuously as possible give expression to works--and then one thing more is required: that thou humble thyself and admit, "But none the less I am saved by grace."...Luther wanted to take away the meritoriousness from works and apply it in a somewhat different place,, namely, to witnessing for the truth. Worldliness, which understood Luther radically, did away entirely with meritoriousness--and with works along with it.[3]

Thus far Kierkegaard exhibits a deep appreciation and understanding of the real spirit of Luther. Always, however,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 41. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

he is severely and bitterly critical of Lutheranism in its later developments. In the paragraphs that follow the passages quoted above Kierkegaard carries on an amusing, as well as significant, conversation between himself and the resurrected Luther. The weight of the argument is that faith is a "perturbing thing," a definition of faith by Luther which S.K. seems to accept. Faith is a perturbing thing and one would naturally expect that it would be evident in a person's life and actions. Such an admission on S.K.'s part appears to be a contradiction of the point of view expressed in Fear and Trembling: namely, that the Knight of Faith is indistinguishable by his outward appearance and acts from the person who has not made the movement of faith.[1] Nevertheless, here Kierkegaard subscribes to the view that while faith is the most important thing, it should certainly give evidence of its presence in the actions of the individual. Such things as works, existence, witnessing and suffering for the truth, and works of love S.K. terms the "subordinate clauses of Lutheranism."

> Not that the subordinate clauses should be made the principal clauses, faith and grace be done away with or disparaged--God forbid; no, it is just for the sake of the principal clauses...that it doubtless would be well to examine a little more carefully the subordinate clauses of Lutheranism....[2]

It is clear that Kierkegaard himself appealed to the

---

[1] Fear and Trembling, pp. 49-52. For opposite point of view cf. Journals, p. 317, #932.

[2] For Self-Examination, pp. 49-50.

authority of Luther to lend strength to his own views. Whether or not he interpreted Luther correctly we do not feel qualified to judge. For example, he assigns to Luther the belief that to suffer in this world and to be a Christian are inseparable ideas. This sounds somewhat as if Kierkegaard were using a subordinate clause of Luther's and raising it to an equal level with his own principal clause: that suffering is the natural state of the Christian. Nevertheless, in his book, Judge For Yourselves!, in the chapter on "Christ as the Pattern," S.K. claims Luther's support in the following:

> And this is Christian piety: to renounce everything in order to serve God alone, to deny oneself everything in order to serve God alone--and then to have to suffer for it, to do good and have to suffer for it. This is what the Pattern expresses; and this also (to mention a mere man who was a distinguished teacher of our Church) is what Luther again and again insists upon, that it belongs to true Christianity to suffer for the teaching, to do good and to suffer for it, and that to suffer in this world is inseparable from being a Christian in this world.[1]

Regardless of whether this notion of suffering was one of Luther's cardinal principles, the significant thing is that S.K. selected this phase of his thinking as an important phase. In other passages he personified his principle of suffering in the man Luther. Thus S.K. wrote: "...Luther's life, although he was not put to death, was nevertheless a sacrificed life, a life sacrificed to witnessing for truth."[2]

In an exceeingly straightforward piece of writing Kierkegaard allows us a brief glimpse of the historical eval-

---

[1]For Self-Examination, pp. 179-180; underlining is mine.

[2]Ibid., p. 202.

uation he placed upon the Middle Ages and Luther's revolution. He begins by defining the category of "decisiveness" in Christianity. Jesus Christ did not come to bring a doctrine, nor to persuade anyone to accept a doctrine. Nor did he go about discovering proofs by which he could substantiate a doctrine. It was his life which constituted his teaching.

> If anyone desired to be His disciple, His way of going about it, as can be seen from the Gospel, was quite another way than the way of lecturing. He said to such a man something like this: "Adventure a decisive action, then we can begin." What does that mean? It means that one does not become a Christian by hearing something about Christ, by reading something, by thinking thereupon, or while Christ still lived upon earth, by seeing Him once in a while, or by going and gaping at Him the whole day. No, what is required is a predicament (situation): adventure upon a decisive action, so that thou dost become heterogeneous with the life of this world, unable any longer to have thy life in it, dost find thyself in conflict with it--then thou wilt gradually be brought into such a tension that thou wilt be able to be observant of what I am here saying (says Christ).[1]

Great errors were present in the Middle Ages, continues Kierkegaard, yet the then prevalent conception of Christianity had a decisive superiority over the conception of his own time. "The Middle Ages conceived of Christianity with a view to action, life, the transformation of personal existence."[2] It was this characteristic of the Middle Ages, as S.K. saw, that constituted its valuable side. Of course, the Middle Ages went wrong in emphasizing too much certain actions as indicative of Christianity--fasting for its own sake, going into a monastery, flagellation, crawling on the knees, or standing upon one leg. The Middle Ages most seriously went astray, however, when they "got the idea of meritoriousness, thought

---

[1] Ibid., p. 100. [2] Ibid., p. 201.

that they acquired merit before God for their good works." After things had become so serious that a brisk trade was accried on in the sale of other people's acquired good works, Martin Luther took action.

> "This situation," said he, "is spiritual apathy. It is a dreadful apathy; otherwise you who by good works think to merit the blessedness of heaven must perecive that this is the sure path, either to presumptuousness (and with this the forfeiture of blessedness), or to despair (and with this the forfeiture of blessedness). For to wish to build upon good works--the more thou dost practice them, and the stricter thou art with thyself, the more thou dost develop in thyself simply anguish of dread, and ever new dread. On that path--if a man is not entirely spiritless, on that path he attains exactly the opposite of quiet and rest for his soul, he attains disquietude and unrest. No, a man is justified only by faith. And therefore, in God's name, to hell with the pope and all his auxiliary assistants, along with all your fasting, flagellation, and all the monkey-shines which are resorted to under the name of 'following'."[1]

So Luther attacked the Pope, but succeeding generations did not share with him the passionate abhorence of exaggerating good works. "No, they transformed the Lutheran passion into a doctrine, and with this they diminished also the vital power of faith."[2]

It will be evident from the material thus far examined that Kierkegaard was at least conscious of being related to Luther. More than to any other Christian theologian within the general Christian tradition S.K. felt himself connected

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 201-202. The reference in this passage to "quiet and rest" for the soul is interesting in view of our earlier understanding of Kierkegaard's concept of faith as involving unrest, tension, "lying over seventy thousand fathoms." Is S.K. here only attributing these words (quiet and rest of the soul as the goal of faith) to Luther? Or does he by implication accept them himself? Cf. pp. 52-56 above.

[2] Ibid., p. 202.

to Luther. This seems at least to be true in regard to the early Luther, the reformer. No doubt S.K. unconsciously (but more likely consciously) identified his protest against the religious evils of his day with Luther's protest in his. Whatever may have been the reason, his Journals provide ample evidence that Luther was frequently in his mind. Sometimes he refers to him to refute him; other times he quotes him with approval, as we have seen.

In the latter part of his life S.K. became much more critical of Luther. As Kierkegaard's own concept of what Christianity required of a man became more severe, he was correspondingly more critical of Luther because he did not seem to meet the new standard. There is a sense in which S.K.'s increasing impatience with Luther reflects upon himself--he was growing farther and farther away from a Christianity that every man could follow. In the end he required martyrdom as the test of being a true Christian. Thus in 1836 S.K. spoke appreciatively of Luther as the one who had "won back the concept of faith for his age."[1] At another time (1838) he compared Luther to Copernicus because he had "discovered that Rome was not the centre about which everything revolved but merely a peripheral fact."[2] Over ten years later we read an entry in the Journal which indicates a sharply critical attitude.

> The end of Luther's sermon on I Cor. xiii, where he concludes that faith is more than love, is sophistry. Luther always wants to explain love as love of one's neigh-

---

[1] Journals, p. 35. [2] Ibid., p. 65, #234.

> bor, as though it were not also a duty to love God. Luther really put faith in the place of love of God, and then called love, love of one's neighbor.[1]

During several years S.K. blew hot and cold over Luther--if the entries in the Journal are any indication. Gradually, however, his criticisms dominated and he went to great extremes in his attacks. In 1849 we find another entry indicating S.K.'s growing impatience with Luther's actions in the latter half of the reformer's life:

> As for the rest, the closer I examine Luther the more convinced do I become that he was muddle-headed. It is a comfortable kind of reforming which consists in throwing off burdens and making life easier--that is an easy way of getting one's friends to help. True reforming always means to make life more difficult, to lay on burdens; and the true reformer is therefore always put to death as though he were an enemy of mankind.
>
> Luther's "Hear me, thou Pope" not to mention anything else, sounds to me almost disgustingly worldly. Is that the sacred earnestness of a reformer concerned only with his own responsibility, who knows that true reformation consists in becoming more inward. Such an expression is like a journalist's slogan. That unholy political attitude, that desire to overthrow the Pope is what is so confusing about Luther.[2]

Only a year before he died S.K. remarked that Luther "really did incalculable harm by not becoming a martyr," and that "by the last part of his life Luther accredited mediocrity."[3] And finally, later on in the same year, Kierkegaard condemned Luther in these words: "Luther; your responsibility is great indeed, for the closer I look the more clearly do I see that you overthrow the Pope--and set the public on the throne."[4]

We have seen that Søren Kierkegaard was very much

---

[1] Ibid., p. 292, #873. [2] Ibid., p. 298, #889.

[3] Ibid., pp. 497-498, #1304. [4] Ibid., p. 500, #1310.

aware of Martin Luther, sometimes as an ally to whom he could turn for support, but frequently as an antagonist against whom he must joust. From Luther he may have received some part of his concept of faith as the miraculous event following utter despair. We have the impression that what he received from Luther was not doctrinal ideas--S.K. was never the man to take over another man's ideas without boiling them down in the crucible of his own thought and experience--but rather a sense of spiritual unity of purpose. Yet it is still true that in his constant references to Luther we have the only substantial evidence of a determinative contact with general Christian tradition. There are innumerable references to the influence of philosophers upon him--Socrates, Plato, Hamann, Lessing, Hegel--but very few to Christian theologians. We have necessarily, therefore, come to somewhat negative conclusions in this comparison of S.K.'s idea of faith with traditional Christian ideas of faith. He simply does not fit in any known category, nor even nearly fit. His concept of faith was a peculiar mixture of agonizing personal experience, an unknown quantity of Christian theology, and an intimate knowledge of classical and modern philosophy. There can be no doubt that the major factor was his own, perhaps somewhat pathological sensitivity and subjectivity.

There are two other problems in connection with the nature of faith in Kierkegaard's thought to which we must give brief attention. The first is the problem of history and its bearing upon faith; the second is the question of

Christian fellowship and what part it plays in the communication of faith. On both these problems we shall find that Kierkegaard has some distinctive ideas.

With regard to the first problem S.K. distinguishes between profane history (what we usually mean by history) and sacred history (the specific history of Christ's life on earth). Sacred history is concerned with the affirmation of faith that Christ was God; profane history is concerned with the time between his life and now, with the consequences of his life on earth. It is Kierkegaard's dogmatic belief that history, in the usual meaning of the term, has absolutely no relevance for faith. What does he mean by this? He is directly attacking those who say that in the history of the consequences of Jesus' life we find indication or proof that he was God. This criticism has particular significance for us because we frequently reason this way ourselves. How frequently we preach a sermon in which we give a brief but masterly survey of Church history, concluding on the basis of the historical evidence we have assembled that Christianity is surely the most reasonable of faiths. Have we not given historical evidence of its sustaining power and its power to win the hearts of men? It is just this type of approach against which S.K. marshals his powers of ridicule and argument.

> If...one begins with the assumption that Jesus Christ was a man, and then considers the history of the 1,800 years (the consequences of His life), one may conclude, with an ascending superlative scale: great, greater, greatest, exceedingly and astonishingly the greatest man that ever lived.--If on the contrary one begins with the assumption (the assumption of faith) that He was God, one has thereby cancelled, annulled, the 1,800 years as having

> nothing to do with the case, proving nothing pro nor contra, inasmuch as the certitude of faith is infinitely higher.[1]

It is never possible, says Kierkegaard, to reason from historical data, in time, to God, who is eternity. Suppose that we see the print of a foot on a forest path. We naturally and rightly conclude that it was made by some creature that passed that way--perhaps a bird. Yet when we examine the footprint further we decide that it was not a bird but some other animal. This too is a legitimate deduction.

> But can I, by a closer inspection of such a track, or by following it farther, reach at one point or another the conclusion: ergo it was a spirit that passed this way? A spirit which leaves no trace behind it! Just so it is with this thing of concluding from the consequences of an (assumed) human existence that ergo it was God.[2]

Thus the whole argument from the consequences of Jesus' life is "incommensurable" with the question of whether He was God--this question is a question which requires a decision: do you believe or do you not?

Such reasoning is not merely a simple error in approach. Faith has a much more serious charge than simple error to hurl at the argument from history. The whole effort to approach Christ with the assistance of what we know of Him through history is blasphemy![3] It is blasphemy to think that history has anything at all to do with Christ. The only history that in any sense applies to Christ is what S.K. terms sacred history, "which recounts the story of His life under the conditions of His humiliation, and reports moreover that He himself

---

[1] Training in Christianity, pp. 29-30.

[2] Ibid., p. 31. [3] Ibid., p. 32.

said He was God."[1] Christ is the absolute paradox and hence can never be approached by way of a syllogism. One can learn nothing whatever from history about Christ becasue, as the paradox, he is solely the object of faith. Historical communication is the communication of knowledge, and we have found S.K. repeatedly asserting that faith and knowledge are utterly opposed.

Kierkegaard develops this theme is greater detail and depth in both the Fragments and the Postscript. He carries his principle of the indifference of faith to historical knowledge to such an extreme that he can say in the Fragments:

> If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: We have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," it would be more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done all that was necessary; for this little advertisement...would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account can in all eternity do nothing more.[2]

All that is necessary for faith is to believe a single fact--that God appeared in time. Thus it follows that for the Christian it is absolutely futile to approach the Bible with anything of a historical interest--if one is concerned for his faith. It is once again the problem of objective versus subjective knowledge, which was thoroughly discussed in this paper, Chapter II.

The most that any historical knowledge can do is serve as an occasion in which faith may come. Thus the contemporary of Jesus has no advantage over the disciple who lives 1800

---

[1] Ibid., p. 33. [2] Fragments, p. 87.

years later. In each case faith depends upon the passion and subjectivity with which the individual appropriates the paradox.

When Kierkegaard speaks of the indifferent value of history for faith it seems to this writer that he thereby places himself outside the central stream of the Hebrew-Christian faith. At no other point, for example, does he seem further from the spirit and emphasis of prophetic Old Testament religion. In his effort to refute Hegel's notion of divine immanence, in which God becomes himself the process of history, Kierkegaard has wildly overstated his case. Is there not a sense in which God can be thought of as the Lord of History without being considered identical with the historical process? The answer (or the beginning of an answer) would seem to be in the prophetic idea of God in the Old Testament. Here God is speaking to men in the events of history. There was no question but that history was related to faith for history was constantly forcing faith to look to itself. History, for the prophets, was the raw material out of which they wrought their idea of God. Any such notion, however, seems a far cry from Kierkegaard.

How far then is S.K. right in saying that the consequences of Christ's life have absolutely no significance for faith? If we are prepared to accept his definition of faith as a passionate grasp of the absolute paradox and the crucifixion of reason we may perhaps go along with him in his denial of the relevancy of history. But we cannot do this, and

we do not believe that the best in Christianity has done this. There is an appeal for faith in the events of history, Christianity has said, and that even when those events are contrary to every hope we hold dear. It is difficult to imagine that Christian faith could have continued if the consequences of Jesus' life had not constantly inspired new faith in generation after generation. Surely it is not a matter of indifference to our faith that great Christians have lived more nobly in their faith. This is precisely the kind of thing that helps one sustain his own faith.

Of course it is true that every person must inwardly appropriate faith, but Christianity has always believed that the lives of other men of faith, and the great events of history have tremendous influence in bringing persons to the point where faith is possible. Faith is not a gift that God gives in a total vacuum, but a gift that is given the more willingly when we are sensitive to his will as it works in history and in other lives. The meaninglessness of history for faith as Kierkegaard expresses it seems therefore to be far off the central path of Christianity.

If, in his doctrine of faith, Kierkegaard meant only to say that faith precedes rather than follows the historical interpretation of life we might be more sympathetic. There is a sense in which the faith of a Christian in its most mature form provides the perspective by which we can under stand history. Yet history itself provides a stimulus to faith; hence both things are true--faith both precedes and

follows our interpretation of history. We must therefore part company with Kierkegaard when he holds that faith gains nothing from history and that the only rewarding source of faith is the single soul's most inward experience. Because God was for S.K. the Eternal, and history the realm of temporal sequence and limitation, they were forever separated by an infinite distance. Yet,as H. R. Mackintosh points out,[1] there was one historical event to which Kierkegaard assigned ultimate meaning--the moment when "the Word took flesh and dwelt among us." He would make no wider application of this unique moment when God revealed himself in time. Mackintosh's words are worth quoting as a summary of our criticism of S.K.'s use, or misuse, of history:

> Brave champion of faith though he was, for the most part and most of all in later years, he persisted in regarding the world of time as a sphere of chaotic darkness; he read its meaning otherwise than by positive faith and, because man cannot rise to God, forgot the greater truth that God was in Christ, he traced providential guidance throughout his own career; but he failed to discover any vast movement of the Divine purpose traversing the generations. To his lonely thought the prophetic reading of history brought no conviction. History gives no revelation of God; even from believing eyes its meaning is completely hidden; if meaning there be, only God can know it. Kierkegaard will not see the promised Kingdom of God looming through the past, beckoning into the future, finally triumphant over human failure. For him only two realities are luminously visible--the God-man and his own soul.[2]

The remaining question to which we must briefly turn our attention has to do with S.K.'s category of the "individual." From all that has been previously said it will be plain that he preached a religion of extreme individualism. We find

---

[1] Types of Modern Theology, op. cit., p. 259.

[2] Ibid.

no quarrel with him when he insists that in the actual moment when faith becomes real for a person he must be alone before God. At that moment no other human being can be present or make the necessary decision for another. We must, however, draw back when S.K. says that human fellowship cannot contribute a single thing to faith. We have said that he preached "individualism" yet it would be unfair to Kierkegaard to apply that term to him in the sense in which we use it today. His individualism was not the right of every individual to fend for himself regardless of his fellows, but the responsibility of every individual, in the spiritual sense, to confront God in utter solitude.[1]

The spiritual individualism which Kierkegaard did preach denied to Christian fellowship any meaning for faith. The "crowd" was anathema to him and his contempt for the majority rule in things ethico-religious was profound.

> There is a view of life which conceives that where the crowd is, there also is the truth, and that in truth itself there is need of having the crowd on its side. There is another view of life which conceives that wherever there is a crowd there is untruth, so that (to consider for a moment the extreme case), even if every individual, each for himself in private, were to be in pos-

---

[1]Cf. George E. Levy, "Kierkegaard's Significance as a Corrective," Colgate-Rochester Divinity School Bulletin, XIV (February 1942), pp. 178-179. "It is a deplorable misunderstanding of Kierkegaard to make his emphasis on the individual synonymous with individualism as we understand it. He had no patience with the idiosyncrasies of separate individuals and less desire to break up society into so many private selves each striving to realize his own petty ambitions. The 'individual' of whom he writes is a spiritual personality, a citizen of eternity, one who stands 'face to face before God.'"

Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 257, seems to disagree with the opinion just quoted. He writes, "Thus...his individualism is of so extreme a type as largely to disqualify him from understanding actual religion."

> session of the truth, yet in case they were all to get together in a crowd--a crowd to which any sort of decisive significance is attributed, a voting, noisy, audible crowd --untruth would at once be in evidence.[1]

Kierkegaard chose the latter point of view himself. His statements on this point seem to us extreme to say the least. Where there is a crowd, he said, and where it is considered a significantly decisive fact that there is a crowd, then one may be quite certain that no one is living and striving for the highest aim, but is concerned only for earthly aims.[2] Thus he would deny that there can be such a thing as group dedication to the doing of God's will, or that one can as a member of a Christian fellowship serve the highest good.

We may of course find an important warning in S.K.'s category of the individual. Yet it is a warning that has been frequently sounded before--the warning against submerging oneself in the crowd and there doing things one would never dare to do as an individual. While recognizing this constructive element we must still deny a doctrine that completely negates the value of fellowship as a source of inspiration and strength for faith. We can again listen with profit to Mackintosh's criticism of S.K. on this point:

> Here fellowship counts for nothing; the Church, even the family, except in a purely external fashion, has no relation to the interior fact of piety...this...is a caricature of Christian discipleship as the New Testament pictures it....The contagion of living faith is a reality; and the persistent imperfection of human faith is no ground for doubting that it can be used by the Holy Spirit for the great purposes of grace.[3]

---

[1] Point of View, p. 112. [2] Ibid., p. 114.

[3] Op. cit., pp. 257-258.

Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the absolute solitariness of the Christian is a direct consequence of his failure to give weight to history as an area of God's continual revelation of Himself. If history can never assist a person to faith then plainly other individuals can not assist either--for they are a part of history. In the words of Maritain,[1] Kierkegaard's faith is a "skinned faith," because it lacks any idea of the Church as the fellowship in which faith is born and nurtured. We may refute S.K. by using his own figure of the pass at Thermopylae through which only one individual at a time may pass: It may be true that only one at a time may go through the pass, but it is also true (and this S.K. would deny) that that one person may find his way up to the pass by the love and guidance of a mighty army of fellow seekers. Søren Kierkegaard is surely to be pitied if he was such a lonely man that he never knew the experience of Christian fellowship in which the slack in one's own soul is taken up by the strength of others, in which one is sustained through the dark nights of one's soul by the faith of one's brothers in Christ. We must conclude, therefore, that in his assertion that fellowship is meaningless for faith, as in his rejection of history as a revelation of God, Kierkegaard is far away from true Christian piety and good Christian theology.

---

[1] Op. cit., p. 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

KIERKEGAARD'S PLACE IN THEOLOGY AND HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY

Two great protests were made by Søren Kierkegaard during his life--the one against Hegelian speculative philosophy and the other against the Established Church of Denmark. In the first case his criticism was devastating and life-long. Brock says that only two of the many criticisms of Hegel have achieved really telling blows against his System as a whole--Marx and Kierkegaard. Thus a part of Kierkegaard's significance in philosophy is to be found in his relation of tension with regard to Hegelian philosophy. It is this relation that we must now note more carefully.

S.K.'s first serious contact with Hegelian philosophy was in his student days at the University of Copenhagen. There, under the leadership of J. L. Heiberg, the chief representative of Hegelian thought in Denmark, S.K. studied the German philosopher thoroughly. In a humorous passage in his introduction to the Postscript he describes the young dialectician who hopefully tackles the System, even translating "all the more important passages into his mother-tongue, to be sure that he understands them and has not overlooked anything."[1] Without doubt this passage is autobiographical and

---

[1] Postscript, p. 17.

reveals the thoroughness with which S.K. studied that which he was to oppose his whole life. Throughout his writings one finds attacks of varying intensity upon Hegel, always upon the basis of his refusal to think as an existential person. For anyone to imagine that he could erect a complete "system" of thought seemed to Kierkegaard the highest presumption. His criticism was as much of the whole spirit of his day as it was against Hegel as the chief representative of that spirit. Systematic philosophy, he accused, imagined that it was only a question of time until the System would be complete, and that until then one must bend every effort to find the still missing pieces. He ironically remarked that he too would be willing to worship the System if it could be demonstrated that it actually existed in its completed form.

One of S.K.'s chief objections to Hegel was his use of dialectic in which opposites were constantly being synthesized on a higher level, thus assuring the ever up-ward movement of truth. By purely logical reasoning we move from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, and if we follow this procedure long enough we arrive at an absolute synthesis--God. Thus everything is subjected to the processes of pure thought and actual existence is presumably transcended. Hegel started with the principle, "All that is rational is real, and that is real is rational,"[1] a principle which was the utter contradiction of Kierkegaard's central emphasis upon the

---

[1]F. Lichtenberger, History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century, trans. and ed. by W. Hastie (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1889), p. 15.

paradox. Interpreting Hegel, Lichtenberger writes:

> Hegel deliberately transports religion from the lower sphere of feeling to the higher sphere of thought; but even in this sphere it occupies only a secondary rank. It expresses under the imperfect form of the symbolical representation or image, what philosophy expresses under the more limpid and more correct form of the conception or Idea. The task of religion is to resolve itself insensibly into philosophy.[1]

Under such a system of becoming everything is relative, with serious consequences for morality and ethics. It was one of S.K.'s complaints that ethics had been "crowded out of the System."[2] The System submerged the "individual" in "bloodless categories" and ignored the individual conscience as it stands confronted by God.[3] It follows that sin could have no reality for speulative philosophy.

> Speculation can take nothing to do with sin; in fact, it ought not to take anything to do with sin. Sin belongs to the sphere of ethics; but ethical and speculative thought are moving in opposite directions. The latter abstracts from reality, the former makes forit. Hence it is that ethics operates with a category which speculation ignores and despises--viz., the individual.[4]

Kierkegaard's dialectical method was different from Hegel's in that it was aimed not at the resolution of the opposites but the maintainance of them in full tension. There is a Divine synthesis, S.K. also believed, but it can never be understood by man. "The antithesis does not issue in synthesis; but the synthesis manifests itself to reason as a

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Postscript, p. 309.

[3] Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 226.

[4] Quoted by Ibid., pp. 226-227.

contradiction," as Aubrey phrases it.[1] Kierkegaard used the phrase "qualitative dialectic" to signify this constant effort to discover and maintain absolute distinctions, each one of which achieves its distinction only with reference to the other. The greatest of these absolute distinctions is the paradox of eternity-time, or God-man, which can only be apprehended by faith. In our deepest experience life is paradoxical, and it is a mistake to try and smooth out that paradox in a superficial synthesis.

> The idealist philosopher, he urges, is playing with life and religion; he stands off with the detached curiosity of the theatre-goer to whom the issue of the drama on the stage matters much less than that he should catch his train.[2]

S.K.'s whole philosophical work must be seen in the context of his protest against Hegelianism. Harold Höffding classifies him as a "critical romanticist" along with Schleiermacher and Shopenhauer[3], yet we suspect S.K. himself would not be entirely happy in the company Höffding wishes him to keep. He found Schleiermacher unsatisfactory, his idea of faith, based on feeling, being nothing more than immediacy.[4] While he was strongly influenced by Shopenhauer's pessimism toward the end of his life he was sharply critical of his philosophy as a whole.[5] It is really necessary to place

---

[1]Edwin Ewart Aubrey, Present Theological Tendencies (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. 70.

[2]Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 227.

[3]Harold Höffding, A Brief History of Modern Philosophy, trans. by Charles Sanders (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912).

[4]Lowrie, Kierkegaard, p. 264. [5]Ibid., pp. 468, 488.

Kierkegaard in a new category, since he cannot be typed in terms of those theologies that came before him and by which he was influenced. Nevertheless, philosophy in general should recognize its debt to S.K. It is a surprising fact, however, that few philosophers of the nineteenth century were even aware of him--if we are to judge from the books of that period. One can glance through the index of book after book on the history of nineteenth century philosophy and find no reference whatever to Søren Kierkegaard. It seems only fair, therefore, to find an awakened interest and appreciation of his work among philosophers of today. Comments such as the following testify that at last S.K. is coming into his own:

> ...Kierkegaard had...insights, and comparing them with the confused volumes of speculative system-building which passed for philosophy, his sense of being was outraged. Hence the constant polemic against speculation, particularly against Hegel, the reigning philosopher, which runs through all of his writings....Kierkegaard possessed the requisite humor, irony, and grasp of human nature to maintain this polemic with full relevance to the modern scene, and yet without serious dilution. It is here that his philosophic importance chiefly lies, as a critic of the false identification of being with thought, underlying so much of post-Cartesian philosophy. The sort of speculative system-building which finds no reduplication in the life of the thinker himself, which thus loses touch with being at a most crucial point, is precisely subjectivism or sophistry, and Kierkegaard laid it bare in almost every niche and cranny of the modern tradition.[1]

As we have noted already, Kierkegaard's second great protest was against the Established Church of his day in Denmark. Apparently convinced that he was serving the cause of true Christianity in near martyrdom he launched a pamphleteer-

---

[1]John Wild, "Kierkegaard and Classic Philsophy," Philosophical Review, XLIX (September 1940), pp. 546-547.

ing attack under the slogan "Christianity does not exist!" He was chiefly concerned to jolt Christians, that is, nominal Christians, from their complacency. The fact that one could be considered a Christian simply by virtue of the fact of being born in a so-called Christian country appeared to S.K. the most terrible blasphemy. "Christianity has done away with Christianity, without being aware of it. The consequence is that, if anything is to be done, one must try again to introduce Christianity into Christendom."[1] This was his task, as he conceived it toward the end of his life. Many of his critics feel that his crusade against the Church was deplorable; others see it as the natural consequence of a line of thought that had long been developing. It is not necessary here to discuss the attack further since we spoke of it in the first chapter at greater length.

Although Kierkegaard had extremely little influence upon theology and philosophy during his lifetime and for some years after, his thought has been widely effective in the last fifty years. Since he lived and wrote he has appealed to a few individuals of astoundingly different backgrounds-- the dramatist Ibsen, Heidegger the philosopher, Unamuno the Catholic novelist-philosopher, and most important, Karl Barth the theologian. Through Barth Kierkegaard was mediated to the protestant theological world, and it is for that reason we desire to discover more of what S.K.'s influence upon Barth was. We shall speak mainly of Barth's earlier

---

[1] Training in Christianity, p. 39.

thought, since he has recently rejected certain phases of Kierkegaard's thinking.

In his book, The Doctrine of the Word of God,[1] Barth reveals that in his more recent thought he is sharply critical of the existential emphasis in S.K. and those who followed S.K. Barth's suspicion of existential theology comes at the point of its tendency to complete subjectivism. He rejects any kind of existential theology whose "...intention is to include an experience and attitude to which I adjust myself, which I put into train, a 'Yes, I'll go!' on the theologians part, so that his theology would have to be throughout a personal cry, a narrative of his own biographical situation."[2] It is plain, however, that this is precisely what S.K. did mean by existential thought. We must conclude therefore that Barth has more recently grown away from Kierkegaard at this point. Existential thinking which is so completely subjective seems to Barth to "anthropologize" theology. "Extend this line of thought," he writes, "and the sensus, the human determinateness, the experience and attitude of the knowing subject might well be exalted into the criterion of theological knowledge."[3] The remedy for this danger is

> "...to grasp with new comprehension at the pre-pietistic doctrine of the theological habitus, in virtue of which the theologian is what he is by the grace of God, quite apart from his greater or less connection with Christ-

---

[1]Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. by G. T. Thomson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

[3]Ibid., p. 20.

> bearing and without the slightest need for existential screaming and the like.[1]

Yet however much Barth now differs from Kierkegaard it is generally recognized that he was originally closely indebted to him. It is this earlier relationship that we are concerned chiefly to trace in this paper.

Barth has himself given us a clue to what he found the greatest significance in Kierkegaard. When accused of having a "system" he replied:

> If I have any "system," it consists in this, that I keep steadily as possible in view what Kierkegaard has called "the infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity, and that both in its positive and in its negative aspects. "God is in heaven and thou upon earth."[2]

Thus as the foundation of Barthian theology we find again the paradox that cannot be resolved--God-man. For Barth, as for S.K., God and man are infinitely far apart and can only be reconciled in Jesus Christ. The two men differ in the details of what they regard as revelation, but they start from the same basis. They are also agreed that God does not reveal himself in rational categories--in objective knowledge. Barth shares with Kierkegaard his rejection of history (world-history) as a source of God's revelation. God's revelation of himself took place once and for all when God's Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.[3] Barth's admission that there are nevertheless

---

[1] Ibid.,pp. 21-22.

[2] Quoted in Walter Lowrie, Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1932), p. 58.

[3] Karl Barth, in Revelation, ed. by John Baillie and Hugh Martin (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 63.

certain "tokens" instituted by Jesus Christ himself which call men to faith may be considered a modification of S.K.'s idea of faith. They are somewhat similar to what Kierkegaard meant by the occasion.

Barth also owes much to S.K. in his idea of faith. We recall that Kierkegaard understood faith as a sudden gift of God; Barth likewise held that the "revelation of God in Christ is discernible only by means of a miraculously bestowed faith."[1] Historical evidence has nothing to do with this faith for faith cannot be based on evidence or proofs. The question of the historicity of the events in Jesus' life raise no problems for faith. In speaking of miracles in the Bible Barth makes clear his indifference to historicity:

> What the Bible brings us from beyond the grave is the perfect, the absolute miracle. The many miracles of the Bible are only illustrations of this, the miracle; the more they tell us the more we are aware of the range of the possibility of the one miraculous new order. And they illustrate what the resurrection illustrates supremely, that it is beside the point even to ask whether they are historical and possible. They make no claim to being either. They signalize the unhistorical, the impossible, the new time that is coming.[2]

Such passages lead one to wonder whether one is reading Kierkegaard or Barth, so similar are they in language and ideas.

In his belief that faith can only come to man when he has reached the lowest point of human despair Barth again

---

[1]Douglas Clyde Mackintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 342.

[2]Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. by Douglas Horton (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928), p. 91.

follows Kierkegaard. When we have faced the complete breakdown of our rational methods of thinking, when "the ultimate bankruptcy of our confidence is reached,"[1] then the revelation of God is given us in Jesus Christ. So long as any pretension or self-confidence remains man must continue to know himself separated from God

Christ is our contemporary, said Kierkegaard, and the Crisis theology has followed him in that idea for the most part. Since the historical facts of Jesus' life have no significance for faith it is possible to say that he is present whenever one grasps the paradox of his existence in faith. Aubrey interprets Barth as follows:

> ...the Christ who is the Word of God is no "Jesus of history." That "historical" Jesus is but a construct of historians' minds, designed to reconcile contradictions which will not down. To the man who stands in the experience of crisis before God, these contradictions have a meaning: they show faith in the paradox in which life itself eventuates. To know Jesus Christ as God's positive word to our trembling, terrified hearts, we must approach him in the spirit of this crisis of our last values and reasons, this paradox. Now we see him as himself a paradox. The impossibilities are here combined, the irreconcilables are here reconciled: God and man, eternity and time, death and resurrection. Here, in him, the conflict is somehow resolved, and thus through him we are saved--not from, but in, our crisis.[2]

It is plain that Barth and the Barthians are following Kierkegaard very closely in the general pattern of their theology.

Let us now try to sum up the relationship between Kierkegaard and Barth. Together they repudiate any attempt to find the basis of faith in objective, rational, historical systems of thought. They share in the conviction that life

---

[1]Aubrey, op. cit., p. 80. [2]Ibid., p. 82.

is paradoxical and contradictory to the core and that these contradictions can never be reconciled by reason--man is finite and cannot hope to achieve the viewpoint of God. On the positive side they join in affirming the absolute distance between man and God--man can never find the way to God, but God can reveal himself to man. They are agreed that the moment in history when God entered time in the person of Christ constitutes the absolute paradox for man, yet remains at the same time the basic fact for faith to grasp. Again they concur in the belief that since reason cannot grasp the absolute paradox of God becoming man the fact can only be understood through an act of faith after man has absolutely despaired. Although their descriptions would vary as to the details of the experience of faith they would both emphasize that it is born in an instant of crisis, brought about by a decisive act of will on man's part--yet nevertheless a free gift of God. And finally, Barth and Kierkegaard both speak of faith as something that must be constantly reaffirmed, reestablished from moment to moment by existential decisions. Kierkegaard says we can only have faith in not having it, that faith is "lying over seventy thousand fathoms." Barth says, "Faith cannot be a concrete thing, that once began, and then continued its course. Faith is the Beginning, the Miracle, the the Creation in every moment of time."[1]

On the other hand Kierkegaard differs from Barth in

---

[1]Quoted by Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, p. 315.

the place he gives to the sense of sin and guilt, and the anguish and dread that is the inevitable accompaniment. Also S.K. was inclined to stress much more heavily the tension of faith, the uncertainty and insecurity. Barth said that faith was never permanently secured, but his emphasis was more upon the repeated achievement of faith than upon the insecurity. Probably the greatest differences between the men come at the point of their respective attitudes toward the Church and the Bible. Although Barth is almost equally as severe in his criticism of the Church as Kierkegaard there is yet a difference, because Barth is criticising the Church from within the Church. As hard on the church as Barth is he yet recognizes it as a hopeful place of repentence. Whereas Kierkegaard, at the end of his life, was prepared to say that salvation was impossible within the church, Karl Barth would still hold that outside the church there is no salvation.[1] There is thus a qualitative difference between the two men on this point. Barth also seems to place more emphasis upon the Bible as the medium of faith than does Kierkegaard.

It is interesting to note that one of America's principal theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr, who perhaps more than any other man mediates European theology to America, considers Kierkegaard one of the greatest of Christian psychologists. Niebuhr refers constantly to Kierkegaard in his discussions upon anxiety in relation to the problem of sin.[2] Thus does

---

[1] Ibid., p. 312.

[2] See Reinhold Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), I, especially pp. 44n, 182 and passim.

Kierkegaard's thought continue to influence modern theological thinking in many parts of the world.

Another member of the Niebuhr family, Richard Niebuhr, has in a recent book given a fresh interpretation of some of the ideas of Kierkegaard, Barth, and the whole existential school of philosophy.[1] It would not be fair to Richard Niebuhr to make him dependent upon any one man--his background is far too rich. He has written a book, The Meaning of Revelation, which is, according to Paul Tillich, "the successful attempt to interpret the idea of revelation in existential terms."[2] We should simply point out that in Richard Niebuhr's emphasis upon existential thinking as opposed to theoretical thinking we have one more contemporary expression of Kierkegaard's thought of nearly one hundred years ago. Theoretical thinking reminds us of S.K.'s diatribes against speculative thought, while existential thinking reminds us once more of S.K.'s subjectivity.

We come now to the question concerning Kierkegaard's meaning for theology and religion in our day. We have already noted some of the dangers of his extreme irrationalism. It should be remembered today that this irrationalism was partly an exaggerated protest against Hegelian rationalism and speculative philosophy, and partly the response of a tortured and

---

[1] The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941).

[2] "Existential Thinking in American Theology," Religion in Life, X (Summer 1941), p. 452.

solitary soul to find meaning in its own existence. In these times of cultural, intellectual, and religious upheaval some may desire to take refuge in a faith such as that we have seen in Kierkegaard, for at certain periods the only faith we know seems to go contrary to reason anyhow. But for the normal human being, the normal person aspiring to be a Christian, Kierkegaard erects too many barriers. His insistence that faith is only faith when it is opposed to all knowledge is too hard a saying for most. Through a long process of educational training the modern man is unable to discard his critical faculties altogether and believe something because it is impossible to understand it. There is a serious danger that the man who does accept such an antithesis of faith and knowledge will go the way that S.K. himself went toward the end of his life--the way of negation. When we dethrone reason completely we may become little better than fanatics in the realm of religion.

It is impossible also to accept Kierkegaard's evaluation of the place of history for faith--or for that matter for life itself. The attempt to orient oneself in terms of a single historic event several thousand years ago may be very sound--provided we recognize the meaning of that event for all those who have lived since. This is precisely what S.K. does not do. Consequently his religion seems attenuated, a religion lacking in historical breadth and depth. His procedure amounts to a declaration that God's revelation of himself stopped nineteen hundred years ago and that the best we

can do is to repeatedly return to that one revelation. S.K. solves the problem for himself by saying that we are always conetmporaneous with Christ when we have faith, but this does not seem an adequate solution. There is much that is precious and meaningful to faith in the lives of the Christians of all ages. There is also a deep significance for faith in the history of the growth and development of the Christian Church. History does have important hings to teach Christians, S.K. to the contrary notwithstanding. It may well be that we do not wish to base our ultimate faith on merely transient phases of universal history, but these phases have a supplementary meaning for our faith at least.

Along with Kierkegaard's rejection of history in relation to religious faith goes a tendency to ignore the results of Biblical scholarship. In the first section of his Postscript S.K. undercuts the significance of Biblical research completely. It makes no difference, is the substance of his remarks, whether we prove the absolute integrity and inspiration of the Bible, or whether we prove exactly the opposite--such things are no concern of faith. Here, as in the case of history, we must disagree. It is of great significance for faith to understand the prophetic history of the Hebrew people and the beginnings of the Christian community. We must agree that these things are not the sole object or cause of faith but they do have their importance for the building of a sound faith.

What it all sums up to, of course, is this: If we

accept the fundamental premise in S.K.'s thought--that faith is against reason--then we shall have no difficulty in following him as he flays out in all directions until he has knocked every last prop upon which traditional Christian faith has rested. Barring our acceptance of his initial premise we must content ourselves with selecting from his thought those aspects that will truly help us, rejecting the rest.

That there is much of a constructive nature in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard no one can deny who has taken the time to read his writings with even a small degree of thoroughness. He regarded himself as a corrective, as one who had to exaggerate his position in order to shock people out of their complacency in the position in he was opposing. When a boast is capsizing, he said, one has to lean far, far out on the other side if one hopes to right it again. We must therefore refuse to take Kierkegaard's exaggerated statement, which because of its exaggeration can manifestly be only partly true, and make it an absolute for our day. What then are the things of a constructive nature which Kierkegaard offers?

First we must acknowledge our debt to him for his emphasis upon the difference between God and man. There is probably no religious problem of our time that so desparately needs a corrective as our sloppy concept of God as immanent--and nothing else. The forces of liberal theology have tended to make God no more than the distillation of the best of human ideals. The process has assumed many forms. Sometimes

it has resulted in a kind of weak mysticism. Again it has resolved itself into humanitarianism or simple naturalism. Whatever form it took the general result was much the same--the absence of any sense of a divine imperative and a corresponding absence of a healthy sense of sin. Recent years have shown that we need a renewed understanding of God as the transcendent being to whom we are nevertheless eternally responsible. Instead of being smugly convinced that every mildly humanitarian impulse we have is God speaking within us, we need to humbly and anxiously wonder whether even our highest impulses can stand the examination of Almighty God.

In his introduction to Purity of Heart, Douglas Steere, the translator, has a sentence which seems to epitomize S.K.'s contribution to our time: "Before the quiet gaze of the Eternal, there is no hiding place." Here we have in one sentence what our age needs to know--that God is not the sum of our good impulses, but stands over against us. When we are confronted by him there are no barriers left behind which we may hide and give only a qualified answer. Kierkegaard himself knew the experience whereof he spoke. He was literally conscious, as was Francis Thompson, of a "Hound of Heaven" which persued him relentlessly. It is this element that our religion needs, and which S.K. can supply in liberal portions if we will but allow him.

A second thing we may well gratefully receive from Kierkegaard is a conception of faith as a dynamic, passionate grasp upon the deepest reality of life--the revelation of God in Jesus. Faith has been watered down for us until it means,

at the very most, the ability to face personal sorrow and suffering without collapse. In recent years, it is true, it is coming to mean more. As the stabilities we have grown accustomed to have failed one by one to sustain us we are beginning to realize that faith must have passion if it is to serve. Thus we are learning what it means to believe passionately in something even though all external signs are against us. In the face of evils greater than we have ever witnessed before we are saying, "Nevertheless and in spite of all I believe that God is at work." We are in a mood to listen more charitably to S.K. as he tells us that faith must be an infinitely interested approach to reality in which we constantly reaffirm our belief in the purpose of God revealed in Jesus Christ. We need to be told that faith is not just naive hope, nor a feeling of blind security, but that it demands a difficult act of our wills and a constant alertness against a too great sense of security. It is true that we may receive greater help from S.K. on this problem from his religious writings than from his aesthetic and philosophical writings, but the help is there if we care to look for it.

Related directly to the problem of dynamic faith is the third contribution that Kierkegaard makes to our age--his emphasis upon existential thinking and living. As religious people we cannot afford to be spectators of life. The decision eternally confronts us, "What are you doing?" Existential living is living in the consciousness that we stand always before God awaiting his merciful judgment. This concept

forever rules out complacency and disinterestedness, for it requires of us that we live under tension. It requires of us that we accept our responsibility for our own actions and answer to God for them. To think existentially means also to live existentially, for unless we "reduplicate" in our actions the goals we set for ourselves in our thinking we are failing as Christians. Existential living also involves existing in a world of relative ends without compromising one's absolute loyalty to the absolute end. Such a task demands the utmost of one's strength. It requires one to "walk always on tip-toe" as Kierkegaard says. The problem of the relative and the absolute is an existential problem because it involves the whole significance of our lives as religious persons. Thus there is in S.K.'s stress on the existing individual something provocative for us today. Our temptation is to want to insulate ourselves against the increasingly terrible demands of existence, but Kierkegaard faces us with the accusation that such a desire is a violation of the very meaning of our lives as existing individuals, confronted with the necessity of making ethical and religious decisions. One of Kierkegaard's most stimulating works is that called "How to Derive True Benediction From Beholding Oneself in the Mirror of the Word."[1] In this brief essay he gives us suggestions for reading the Bible existentially. When we read the Bible existentially we are to say constantly "It is I that am here addressed, it is about me this is said."

---

[1] For Self-Examination, chapter I.

This is the essence of existential living, not only in reading the Bible, but also in daily living. Kierkegaard contributes in this idea something important for our age. He asks us to live each moment with the whole of our being, conscious of the ethical decisions that confront us as persons who are existing, and conscious that we are held responsible to God for the seriousness with which we confront serious alternatives. Few theologians have given us ideas so calculated to stir our consciences and quicken our sensitivities as has Kierkegaard with his plea for existential living.

A fourth contribution of Kierkegaard's is simply the negative side of his emphasis upon existential thinking. By his insistence upon the subjective, interested, and passionate attitude toward life and toward religion he has attacked the coldly intellectual, objective attitude which makes of men little more than disembodied intellects. Thus he has made a negative contribution to the complacency of all too scholarly professors and preachers. All professional ministers and teachers could profit by reading his innumerable criticisms of Privatdozents, those persons who spend their lives teaching a second hand religion. Thus there is a jolt in the following entry in the Journals:

> The Two Ways
>
> One is to suffer; the other is to become a professor of the fact that another suffered.
>
> The first is "the way"; the second goes round about (the proposition "about" is so aptly used for lectures and sermons) and perhaps it ends by going down.[1]

---

[1] Journals, p. 528, #1362.

The final contribution we must mention is the example of personal piety that Kierkegaard has left us. There are those who dismiss him with the callous remark that he was a mentally sick man and we must therefore discount everything he had to say. It is no doubt true that he verged on the pathological, and that this fact is an element to be considered, but it remains a fact that he was a deeply religious man. He has been compared with Pascal and Dostoyevsky and we must agree that this is justified. Throughout his works are passages that are among the finest devotional reading we can find anywhere. The prayers with which he introduced many of his religious writings reveal a man who knew what it meant to have fellowship with God--no matter how many words he wrote to insist that God was "wholly other." This aspect of Kierkegaard's life and work will have an appeal for many that will never care to delve deeper into his philosophical thought. It is small wonder that interest is increasing as more of his works are translated into English.

We conclude this study with the feeling that we have been privileged to look into the mind and spirit of one whose thought and life have been singularly unappreciated. We do not feel that we have in any sense become a disciple of Søren Kierkegaard. Here was a man who possessed far too many aspects to his thought for anyone to become a strict disciple. As a result there is probably no one today who could legitimately be termed a "Kierkegaardian." Even Walter Lowrie, who would perhaps come as close to qualifying as any man, is extremely critical of many phases of Kierkegaard's thought. Yet

in spite of the fact that we have not been converted the study has been immensely worth while. It has been so partly because we have achieved some small understanding of the source of one important school of theological thought--the Barthians. Partly it has been worth while because of the great variety of suggestive ideas that have come as a result. There are few men who offer such an intriguing problem in human personality, combined with an amazing fertility of thought. We would be the last to deny that it sometimes requires a strenuous effort of the will to push through particularly imvolved and repetitious pages; on the other hand one never knows in reading Kierkegaard when his mood will suddenly and brilliantly change. Thus in the course of several hours reading one finds an amusing mixture of satirical humor, biting irony, and virile criticism--the whole undergirded by a serious purpose that is never really forgotten. We should therefore admonish whomever it may concern: Read Kierkegaard for the good of your soul and the strength of your mind.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Aubrey, Edwin Ewart. Present Theological Tendencies. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936.

Augustine. The City of God. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Vol. I. Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1887.

Barth, Karl. The Doctrine of the Word of God. Translated by G. T. Thomson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

_____. The Word of God and the Word of Man. Translated by Douglas Horton. Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928.

Chaning-Pearce, M. The Terrible Crystal. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1940.

Gilson, Etienne. Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938.

Höffding, Harold. A Brief History of Modern Philosophy. Translated by Charles Finley Sanders. New York:Macmillan Company, 1912.

The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard. A selection edited and translated by Alexander Dru. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938.

Kierkegaard, Søren. Christian Discourses and the Lillies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939.

_____. Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments. Translated by David F. Swenson, completed after his death and provided with notes and introduction by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1941.

_____. Fear and Trembling, a Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silento, pseud. Translated by Robert Payne. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939.

Kierkegaard, Søren. For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

_____. Philosophical Fragments. Translated by David Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936.

_____. The Point of View, including the Point of View for my work as an Author, Two Notes about "the Individual", and On My Work as an Author. Translated with an introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie. New York: Oxford University Press, 1940

_____. Purity of Heart is to will One Thing. Translated with an introductory essay by Douglas Steere. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

_____. Stages on Life's Way. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940.

_____. Training in Christianity. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Lichtenberger, F. History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century. Translated and edited by W. Hastie. Edinburg: T.& T. Clark, 1889.

Lowrie, Walter. Kierkegaard. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938.

_____. Our Concern With the Theology of Crisis. Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1932.

Luther, Martin. "Christian Liberty". Luther's Primary Works. Edited by Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim. London: John Murray, 1883.

_____. "Introduction". A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1860.

Macintosh, Douglas Clyde. The Problem of Religious Knowledge. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940.

Mackintosh, H. R. Types of Modern Theology. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937.

McGiffert, Arthur Cuchman. A History of Christian Thought. Volume II. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

Maritain, Jacques, et al. Religion and the Modern World. University of Pennsylvania Bicentennial Conference. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941.

Means, Stewart. Faith: An Historical Study. New York: Macmillan Company, 1933.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. Nature and Destiny of Man. Vol. I. Human Nature. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941.

Niebuhr, Richard. The Meaning of Revelation. New York: Macmillan Company, 1941.

Revelation. Edited by John Baillie and Hugh Martin. New York: Macmillan Company, 1937.

Swenson, David F. Something about Kierkegaard. Edited by Lillian Marvin Swenson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941.

Articles

Levy, George E. "Kierkegaard's Significance as a Corrective," Colgate-Rochester Divinity School Bulletin, XIV (February, 1942), 175.

Tillich, Paul. "Existential Thinking in American Theology," Religion in Life, X (Summer, 1941), 452.

Thomsen, Eric H. "That Tremendous Dane," Religion in Life, II (Spring, 1933), 247.

Wild, John. "Kierkegaard and Classic Philosophy," Philosophical Review, XLIX (September, 1940), 536.

End of

The nature of faith in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard

This title was preceded by

Religious experience and reason as the sources of Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of God

Prayer in intertestamental literature

And is continued by

Some relationships between Second Isaiah and the Pentateuch

Search by title on archive.org to continue reading this collection of Pacific School of Religion Theses from 1942
call number Thesis Cage 1942 A